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# A Friendship Forged In Blood

## Thirty Years Of Sino-North Korean Relations

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## ABSTRACT

Il rapporto Cina-Corea del Nord. Una relazione che negli anni passati è spesso passata in secondo piano e considerata come un mero retaggio della Guerra Fredda che si trascina a fatica col passare dei lustri, che persiste indolenzita ma non crolla. Molti degli osservatori internazionali si pongono continuamente la domanda del perchè la Cina non si liberi di un'alleanza che ha sempre più le sembianze di un fardello difficile da portare. Ci si chiede il motivo della longevità di questo rapporto senza spesso capirne le complessità e le sfumature più lievi che messe insieme portano alla comprensione del quadro generale della faccenda e che aiutano a capire cosa stia dietro a questa complicata relazione.

Negli ultimi anni il problema del legame tra Cina e Corea del Nord è tornato in auge e trova spazio anche nelle prime pagine dei giornali. La minaccia di una Corea del Nord capace di produrre l'ordigno nucleare ci fa riflettere sul fatto che forse per risolvere la questione bisogna capire non solo la Corea del Nord ma anche quello che è rimasto il suo unico vero paese alleato sulla scena internazionale e senza dubbio il maggior punto di riferimento e sostegno dal punto di vista economico.

Per capire e risolvere la questione "Corea del Nord" bisogna ampliare il proprio campo visivo e non fermarsi ad osservare solo quello che succede a Sud dei fiumi Yalu e Tumen e a Nord del trentottesimo parallelo. Il tutto va osservato in un ambito più vasto e solo allora si scorgerà che le lande apparentemente fredde e desolate del Nord Est cinese, la regione chiamata Dongbei in Mandarino e storicamente nota come la Manciuria, offrono uno scorcio diverso che può offrire spunti di riflessioni più profondi.

Così scopriamo che nonostante la Cina abbia appoggiato e votato a favore di sanzioni contro la Corea del Nord in Consiglio di Sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite, nelle zone di confine sopra menzionate non solo sta fiorendo un consistente commercio di frontiera ma ambiziosi progetti industriali vengono lanciati e discussi su iniziativa della

stessa Cina.

Il fiorire della città portuale di Dangong, i progetti industriali del triangolo del Tumen o il piano di sviluppo dell'area chiamata Changjitu sono solo l'aspetto più lampante di come un rapporto che sembra a molti ormai obsoleto, celi invece ancora una continua cooperazione che, seppur avendo attraversato momento bui, non è mai cessata di esistere da quando dal 1950 è stata “forgiata nel sangue”, come la Cina e la Corea del Nord stesse hanno così spesso definito la propria amicizia.

In questo lavoro ho voluto soffermarmi e focalizzarmi sulle origini e sui primi 25-30 anni di questo legame tra Cina e Corea del Nord proprio perchè sono convinto che nulla nel presente si possa spiegare senza capirne le cause radicate nel passato. Gli eventi della storia sono spesso gli scrigni che racchiudono preziose chiavi di lettura indispensabili per comprendere fenomeni odierni. Questo più che mai è valido nel campo delle relazioni internazionali.

Indagando le cause e analizzando il rapporto tra Cina e Corea del Nord dal suo nascere e nei primi due decenni e mezzo della sua esistenza spero di poter aiutare chiunque si ponga le mie stesse domande a comprendere il perchè questa relazione sopravviva fino ai giorni nostri.

Dopo un quadro introduttivo per spiegare la divisione della penisola coreana e la formazione dei due regimi a Nord e Sud del trentottesimo parallelo, ho deciso di cominciare dalla guerra di Corea, perchè lì fu il momento in cui la peculiarità del rapporto tra Cina e Corea del Nord si venne a creare. Nulla sarebbe stato lo stesso se la Cina non avesse deciso di intervenire con i propri soldati in sostegno del vicino in difficoltà. Questa scelta acquista ancora maggiore spessore se pensiamo che la Cina usciva da dodici lunghi e sanguinosi anni di guerra. Dal conflitto col Giappone che era iniziato con l'invasione nipponica nel 1937 alla guerra civile che si era protratta fino al 1949 quando l'1 di Ottobre venne proclamata la Repubblica Popolare Cinese. Mao Zedong si trovò alla guida di un paese stremato che voleva solo sollevarsi e rinascere e una popolazione stanca che chiedeva solo la pace e la tranquillità di una

vita lontana dal frastuono del conflitto. In questa situazione la scelta di Mao di intervenire a fianco di Kim Il Sung aiuta a capire a quale profondità quest'alleanza venne forgiata. Negli anni successivi alla guerra di Corea entrambi i regimi, per descrivere il loro rapporto ricorreranno frequentemente a espressioni del genere “un'amicizia forgiata nel sangue”, “un'amicizia cementata nel sangue”, “un'alleanza sigillata nel sangue”.

Proprio il sangue spillato dai due eserciti alleati, combattenti l'uno a fianco all'altro sotto un'ideologia comune, ha dato a questo rapporto una peculiarità e una profondità che nemmeno future incomprensioni di tipo politico o economico saranno in grado di infrangere.

Il conflitto in Corea non è stato che il punto di partenza.

Nel 1953 quando cessano i combattimenti e viene firmato l'armistizio a Panmunjeom la Corea del Nord e soprattutto la capitale Pyongyang erano state rase al suolo dai bombardamenti delle forze alleate delle Nazioni Unite e dell'esercito americano. Oltre ai danni causati dalle sole bombe sganciate, quando l'esercito americano respinto dall'avanzata cinese ripiegava a Sud faceva terra bruciata e cercava di distruggere tutte le potenziali fonti di rifornimento che potevano essere riutilizzate dall'esercito nemico che avanzava.

Di tutto il tessuto industriale e delle varie fabbriche e stabilimenti costruiti durante l'occupazione giapponese non rimase quasi più nulla.

L'ammontare degli aiuti ricevuti dall'Unione Sovietica, dagli altri paesi est europei del blocco comunista e dalla Cina fu di proporzioni mastodontiche. Materiali, valuta, forza lavoro, esperti nei vari settori del campo militare e civile, alimenti, medicinali e altri beni di ogni genere fluirono pressochè incostantemente nell'opera di ricostruzione della Corea del Nord.

Quella che però fu uno dei contributi di maggior rilevanza, anche dal punto di vista umano, fu la quantità di forza lavoro che la Cina fornì sottoforma dei propri soldati. Decine di migliaia di truppe dell'Esercito Popolare dei Volontari rimasero stanziato in territorio coreano per aiutare nella ricostruzione di ponti, strade, ospedali e infrastrutture varie. Quando se ne andarono nel 1958 vennero salutati con grandi festeggiamenti da parte della popolazione e del

governo Nord Coreano e si lasciarono dietro un sentimento di grande riconoscenza nei confronti della Repubblica Popolare di Cina.

La seconda metà degli anni 50 fu quella delle riforme sia in campo politico che in campo economico. Quelle in campo politico presero la forma di consistenti epurazioni all'interno del partito comunista nordcoreano, tese ad eliminare le varie fazioni che potevano ostacolare la leadership indiscussa di Kim Il Sung. I membri delle varie fazioni pro Cina o pro unione sovietica vennero pian piano eliminati dalla scena politica e tutto il potere finì per venire concentrato nella figura di Kim Il Sung e dei suoi compagni d'armi che avevano condiviso con lui gli anni della guerriglia anti-giapponese in Manciuria.

Nel campo economico collettivizzazione dell'agricoltura e precedenza all'industria pesante. Colpiscono le similitudini tra la riforma chiamata "Chollima" e il Grande Balzo in Avanti proposto negli stessi anni da Mao in Cina.

Gli anni 60 sono quelli che mettono alla prova l'abilità diplomatica di Kim Il Sung.

La frattura nel rapporto tra Unione Sovietica e Cina metteranno il leader nord coreano in grave difficoltà, più vicino alla Cina sul piano ideologico non poteva però fare a meno dei generosi aiuti sovietici soprattutto in campo militare. Una strategia di neutralità e spesso di opportunismo gli permetteranno di giocare la rivalità tra i due giganti comunisti a proprio favore. Minacciando di schierarsi al fianco prima dell'uno e poi dell'altro riuscirà ad estrarre aiuti economici e militari da entrambi.

La seconda metà degli anni 60 racchiude forse i momenti più bui e difficili della relazione sino-nord coreana. La profonda instabilità interna e i tumulti della Rivoluzione Culturale in Cina metteranno a dura prova i rapporti tra i due paesi. I ripetuti attacchi e le accuse di revisionismo da parte delle Guardie Rosse nei confronti del leader Nord Coreano non furono accolti con entusiasmo a Pyongyang anche se non si arrivò mai al punto di rottura. Passati gli anni difficili

della Rivoluzione Culturale i rapporti torneranno rapidamente sul binario della cooperazione e della fraternità.

Cominciando con la decisione di Mao Zedong di entrare in guerra al fianco della Corea del Nord ho deciso di concludere sempre con Mao Zedong, in questo caso alla fine degli anni 70 quando, nel settembre del 1976, il leader cinese passò a miglior vita dopo 27 anni alla guida della Repubblica Popolare. Proprio negli ultimi anni di vita del Gran Timoniere, il rapporto con la Corea del Nord fu messo alla prova dal riallacciamento dei rapporti tra la Cina e gli Stati Uniti di Nixon, nemici di sempre di Kim Il Sung. Anche questa volta l'amicizia sino-coreana ne uscì intatta.

Un percorso tortuoso e difficile quello che mi sono impegnato ad affrontare nella stesura di questo lavoro. Un compito reso molto arduo dalla scarsità di fonti primarie reperibili sull'argomento.

A causa dell'assoluta impenetrabilità dell'archivio nord coreano e della parca disponibilità di fonti cinesi, soprattutto di fonti non imbevute dalla politica di propaganda del partito, il portare a termine questo lavoro non è stata cosa semplice. Ho cercato di raccogliere e rivedere alla luce dei nuovi avvenimenti i vari frammenti scritti negli anni dai pochi autori che si sono preoccupati di trattare l'argomento. Un aiuto di primaria importanza e su cui ho largamente fatto affidamento sono gli archivi di stato dei paesi dell'ex blocco comunista che negli ultimi anni ci stanno fornendo molto materiale di grande utilità nel complicato processo di assemblamento di quel puzzle che è il rapporto sino-nord coreano.

Fonti Sovietiche, Cecoslovacche, Bulgare, Ungheresi, Rumene, Polacche e dell'allora Repubblica Democratica Tedesca sono state di enorme supporto nel fornirmi un quadro più completo e neutrale riguardo al tema trattato.

Inoltre tutto questo non sarebbe stato possibile senza il meticoloso lavoro di raccolta, traduzione e archiviazione di suddette fonti portato avanti dall' "International Cold War History Project" del Wilson Center che condivide tale materiale online per la fruizione di noi studiosi.

Per quanto incompleto e lacunoso possa essere il risultato ottenuto

sono convinto che quello che sono riuscito a mettere insieme in questi mesi di lavoro possa essere da guida per chiunque in futuro decida di navigare le torbide acque delle relazioni sino-nord coreane, aspettando i giorni in cui l'apertura di tutti gli archivi finalmente ci rivelerà tutti i retroscena di quest'amicizia “forgiata nel sangue”.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	x
Introduction.....	1
1. From The Enthusiasm Of Liberation To The Tragedy Of War, 1945-1953.....	3
Negotiating The Future Of The Peninsula.....	3
Drawing The Line.....	5
Liberation And Soviet Arrival.....	9
Kim Il Sung, Profile Of A Guerrilla Fighter.....	12
Admnistering The South: The Unites States In Korea.....	17
The Disenchant Of Division.....	21
Sowing The Seed Of Friendship: Chinese-North Korean Ties Before The Korean War.....	28
Road To War.....	34
Korea Vs Korea.....	43
2. Fraternal Assistance And Post-War Reconstruction, 1953-1958.....	48
3. In Search Of Balance: Kim Il Sung In The Sino-Soviet Rift,	



1959-1964.....	57
From Brothers To Archenemies: Rise And Fall Of The Sino-Soviet Alliance.....	57
Pyongyang Swinging Diplomacy: Back And Forth Between Moscow And Beijing.....	71
4. Facing Hard Times: The Years Of The Cultural Revolution, 1965-1970.....	93
Rise And Fall Of The Cultural Revolution.....	94
Foreign Affairs During The Cultural Revolution.....	101
5. Friendship And Compromise, 1971-1976.....	120
6. Symbolism In Sino-North Korean Relations.....	126
Conclusions.....	132
Bibliography.....	134

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## INTRODUCTION

Every time I look at a world map and I see the Korean peninsula the first impression that I have is that the Cold War has left behind a cruel heritage. Games of powers perpetrated by the Super Powers and capitalized by local actors had often caused the division of territories and with them of entire populations. People that used to share the same language, culture, traditions, folklore, became victims of history and had to accept imaginary but insurmountable lines that divided their own motherland. Vietnam, Germany, Korea are the most striking examples, but if Vietnam and Germany found their way back to national reunification, Korea is still trapped in the marsh of the division. A nation and a people that had been united for centuries had found itself split in two halves that constantly oppose each other chasing the same dream of being one day, once again, one country. The situation of the Korean peninsula, with its two Koreas, North and South, constitutes one of the most problematic issue of the contemporary world, an unfinished history that needs to reach its happy ending to bring stability to the area and to the whole world. Being North Korea one of the hottest issue of our days I wanted to go back to its first decades of life and analyze in particular its relation with another country of utter importance in today geopolitics: China. Grasping what is behind the Sino-North Korean link is the key to have a deeper understanding of the Korean peninsula, a tool necessary to solve the issue that brings instability in Eastern Asia. To understand the present we need to know the past and this is why I have decided to plunge myself deep into the years from the end of the Second World War until the second half of the 1970s and examine the relations between the two countries in the first thirty years of their alliance. Chapter One analyzes the causes of the division of the peninsula and the reasons that brought to the outbreak of the Korean War, the conflict that sealed the division of the country but also the event that forged and consolidated the North Korean alliance with China.

Chapter Two deals with the post-war reconstruction period from 1953 to 1958 when the Soviet Union, China and East European countries gave North Korea substantial economic aid to help rebuilding the country and the economy after the disaster of the Korean War.

Chapter Three follows the rise and fall of the Sino-Soviet alliance and Kim Il Sung attempt to hold the balance between the two rivals, maximizing the profit and being able to obtain economic and military aid from both of them.

Chapter Four examines the troubled years of the Cultural Revolution and the consequences that the turmoil in China domestic politics brought to its foreign policy and in particular to North Korea. The second half of the 1960s had been in fact the lowest point in the relations between the two countries, few years that for the first and the last time witnessed bitter attacks from both sides against each other.

The relations normalized from the 1970s on with the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The 1970s are analyzed in the fifth and final chapter. The rapprochement between Mao and the United States of Richard Nixon required Kim Il Sung to review its hostile politics against South Korea. This journey ends with the death of Mao Zedong because with his departure the revolutionary fervour that had been characterized Chinese foreign policy and also Chinese relations with North Korea starts to fade away to leave space for a more pragmatic approach. Deng Xiaoping will put economic development and geopolitical interests far ahead any Maoist ideal of a continuous revolution. North Korea will still be an old friend and ally, but this friendship will become fully subordinate to Chinese interest.

Understanding Chinese-North Korean ties is essential to solve the problem of the Korean peninsula and to understand the relation between China and North Korea today we need to go back to the origin and to the first decades of their alliance. Only in this way the picture of a peaceful Eastern Asia will become less blurred.

# 1. FROM THE ENTHUSIASM OF LIBERATION TO THE TRAGEDY OF WAR, 1945-1953

## NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE OF THE PENINSULA

Discussions concerning the future of territories invaded and occupied by the Japanese in the Asia-Pacific region were already in progress before the end of the Second World War. The question of what to do with the Korean peninsula came out in March 1943 when British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden went to the United States to discuss the matter with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The outcome was the proposal made by the American president of placing Korea under the jurisdiction of an international trusteeship led by the United States, China, the Soviet Union and one or two other countries.

At the Cairo conference of November 1943 Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek agreed that once the war was over Korea should be granted independence "in due course". The term "in due course" written on the final declaration issued at the end of the conference will cause great misunderstandings between the Allied forces and the Korean people. What the leaders of the Allied powers meant was that Korea would become independent but not immediately after the liberation, rather after a period of "state building" under the supervision of the above mentioned trusteeship. For an inaccuracy in the translation of the declaration, the Korean version of the documents rendered the expression "in due course" with something that in Korean language could indicate a time span as short as few days.

This formula of "independence in due course" was ambiguous and left room for a great variety of different interpretations and misunderstandings thus casting clouds of uncertainty on the future of the Korean people. This interim period between liberation from the Japanese occupation and full independence left to foreign powers,

which had geopolitical interests on the Korean peninsula, time for manoeuvring and shaping the domestic political situation of Korea to their own advantages. This meant that any army involved in the liberation of the peninsula from the Japanese could consider that occupying the biggest portion of territory would have been very rewarding in order to strengthen its own leverage vis-à-vis the other allied powers in the final settlement of the Korean matter. This was especially true for the Soviet Union that, even though not yet involved in the Pacific War at that time, for obvious geographical proximity could be the first country to arrive with its troops on the peninsula.

Stalin was not consulted before the issuing of the Cairo Declaration but Soviet participation in the trusteeship was already envisaged when the leaders of the United States, China and Great Britain discussed it and came to the conclusion that the Soviet ally should have a role in the future of Korea.

Stalin accepted the concept of the trusteeship for mainly two reasons. The first reason was purely to boost Soviet propaganda among emerging third-world regimes. The Soviet Union had always championed the independence and the liberation of the nations oppressed by foreign imperialism, supporting the trusteeship the Soviet Union could depict itself as a promoter of the interests of all the nations fighting for self-determination and gain the sympathy of those people engaged in the struggle for freedom and liberations from the colonial oppressors. Independence of the non-Western nations meant the collapse of the French and British colonial empire and consequently, much to Stalin's liking, the weakening of France and Great Britain themselves.

The second reason was of a more utilitarian nature. Being the Soviet Union involved in the "state-building" process of the trusteeship could give Stalin the opportunity to exert his influence over areas of the world in which previously the Soviet Union had no involvement or over which did not hold sway.

How long the trusteeship period should have lasted was a matter to be debated between the Allied powers whose opinions on the matters were very different and often conflicting.

Roosevelt, trying to find the path to follow to build a self-governing country, looked at the example of the Philippines where the United States took fifty years to bring the country to a stage considered appropriate for full independence. In the case of Korea, in order to take the new country to a level of self-government, the American President, as he will later explain to Stalin at Yalta (February 4-11, 1945), envisaged a period of time spanning between twenty to thirty years. At the earlier Teheran conference (November 28 – December 1, 1943), when discussing the matter with Churchill, the two had even suggested forty years. Stalin was in favour of a more immediate solution that would have granted full independence to Korea as quickly as possible.

## DRAWING THE LINE

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. Two days later, on August 8, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and on August 9 began the invasion of the Japanese occupied Manchuria.

Soviet participation in the Pacific War was agreed at the Teheran and Yalta conferences according to which the Soviet Union would have begun the attack on Japan within three months of the end of the war in Europe where Germany surrendered on May 8.

On August 9 a second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki and the Japanese government gave its first signs of an imminent surrender which came on August 15.

Everything happened so suddenly that the Americans had to be quick to find a way to divide the Korea in zones of occupation so that the first army to arrive, presumably the Red Army, would not occupy the entire peninsula. In fact the Soviets were already entering Korea from the north-east while the closest American soldiers were in Okinawa, almost 1000 kilometres away.

In Washington the state and war department had different opinions on how accept and handle the surrender of Japan. The State Department wanted a complete surrender of the Japanese forces in

all the occupied territories up to Manchuria but at the same time the American military did not want to take any responsibility for areas in which they had no troops on the ground and were not willing to go to the mainland.

On the night of August 14 the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWINK or SWNCC) gave Colonel Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel the task to divide Korea in two zones of occupation, respectively an American and a Soviet one.<sup>1</sup>

What happened during that night will have heavy consequences for the future of the Korean peninsula and for the Korean people and can be recounted through the words of Colonel Rusk:

*“We finally reached a compromise that would keep at least some US forces on the mainland, a sort of toehold on the Korean peninsula for symbolic purposes. During a SWINK meeting on August 14, 1945, the same day of the Japanese surrender, Colonel Charles Bonesteel and I retired to an adjacent room late at night and studied intently a map of the Korean peninsula. Working in haste and under great pressure, we had a formidable task: to pick a zone for the American occupation. Neither Tic nor I was a Korea expert, but it seemed to us that Seoul, the capital, should be in the American sector. We also knew that the US Army opposed an extensive area of occupation. Using a National Geographic map, we looked just north of Seoul for a convenient dividing line but could not find a natural geographical line. We saw instead the thirty-eighth parallel and decided to recommend that.*

*SWINK accepted it without too much haggling, and surprisingly, so did the Soviets . . .*

*Any future talk about the agreed-upon reunification of Korea would be seen as mere show. But we were ignorant of all this, and SWINK’s choice of the thirty-eighth parallel, recommended by two tired colonels working late at night,*

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<sup>1</sup> Some other accounts recall a different date and indicate that the fact took place on the night between August 10 and August 11.



*proved fateful.”*<sup>2</sup>

What is very important to notice is that the line drawn on the thirty-eight parallel was completely arbitrary. It had no relations with previous historical, cultural or geographical borders that had crossed the Korean peninsula which had been united for centuries and maintained its cultural and ethnic unity even under the Japanese colonial rule. The Korean people had never imagined or perceived any sort of separation between the North and the South of the country. The separation proposed by Colonel Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel had purely a military function and did not take into consideration any aspect related to Korean culture, history or Korean people's aspiration for independence.

At this point a question naturally rises. Why did Stalin accept the division of Korea in two zones of occupation at the thirty-eight parallel when he could possibly take control of the entire peninsula before the first American troops would have been able to land on the Southern part of Korea?

We can provide multiple answers for this question, in order to analyse the different aspects that Stalin himself might have considered when faced with the American proposal.

As already agreed back in 1943, Stalin was aware of the fact that the situation in Korean would have been settled in future talks with the United States, China and Great Britain on the model of the trusteeship proposed by Roosevelt. Thus the American proposal of the thirty-eight parallel was not necessarily meant to be a final settlement but more of a flexible draft subjected to possible changes to be discussed when the parties would have sit around the table to finalize the question. Moreover in light of the current situation, the Soviet Union alone would have jurisdiction on all the upper half of the peninsula, on the North of the thirty-eight parallel, while roughly the same amount of territory will be administered by the United States, China and Britain combined. Stalin might have considered this quite

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<sup>2</sup> Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition Of Korea After World War II, A Global History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 37-38.

advantageous and regarded it as a compensation for the fact that in Europe, despite a much bigger sacrifice in terms of human lives, the Soviet Union had received a much smaller area of Germany compared to the Western allies. In East Asia the Soviets contributed to a lesser extent to the liberation of the countries under Japanese occupation but still they were entrusted with a wider portion of Korean territory.

Stalin by nature had a very cautious approach when dealing in the field of international diplomacy and foreign policy. In addition, by the end of the Second World War, the Soviet leader was well aware of the weakness of the Soviet Union which underwent enormous sacrifices in term of human losses in order to defeat the Nazis. The army was also very weak after years of intense military campaigns. The Soviet leader wanted to avoid at any cost any kind of confrontation with the United States which on the other hand could count on a booming industry which had suffered no damages during the war and ready to be deployed in full scale and at any time at the service of the American army. The American had undisputable supremacy in the air and on the seas and just in those days had shown to the world that they now possessed the most terrible and destructive of all the weapons, the atomic bomb. American bombers and aircraft carriers were able to deliver massive destruction and, if provoked, an attack could be launch at any time from the myriad of bases that the Americans had all around the globe. Stalin made sure that Soviet troops would not cross the line recommended by the U.S. on the thirty-eight parallel.

Another aspect that the Soviet leader might have considered is the fact that accepting the American proposal of the thirty-eight parallel division he would be offered the possibility of taking part in the administration of Japan. This was doomed to be a delusion as the United States had already in mind to make Japan the new outpost of American presence in East Asia. In reality Japan and not Korea was the top priority of American policy in the area. The United States and the commander in chief of the American forces in the Pacific responsible for the administration and reconstruction of Japan, General Douglas MacArthur, did not have a clear policy regarding the

future of Korea and it is possible that the decision to send troops to the Southern part of the Korean peninsula was made, in fact, to create a buffer to protect Japan. In addition, given MacArthur fierce anticommunism, it was even more unlikely that he would have accepted a Soviet-American joint jurisdiction over Japan.

Finally, we also need to consider the possibility that the Soviet troops actually could not have the capability of taking control of the entire Korean peninsula before the arrival of the American forces. The Soviets had rushed to enter the war against Japan and much of his army was still deployed in Manchuria while was the Twenty-fifth Army alone that undertook the task of taking control of Korea.

The Twenty-fifth Army was in fact small and poorly equipped, made up of ex-prisoners from the Siberian labour camps. Stalin, also knowing the military potential of the American troops, could have considered the takeover of the entire peninsula by his forces quite unfeasible and thus rather decided to accept the proposed division and stop at the thirty-eight parallel avoiding in this way any risk of clash with the Americans.

## LIBERATION AND SOVIET ARRIVAL

Inside Korea August 15, 1945, was a day of joy and hope for a new, bright future. When the Korean people heard Japanese Emperor Hirohito's speech on the radio, to their surprise they realized that the day of Japan's capitulation had arrived and war was over. The Koreans, unaware of the Allied Powers' plan to establish a trusteeship, thought the dream of an independent Korea could finally be realized.

All over the thirteen provinces of the country and even at local level of cities and counties, People's committees which encompassed all types of political orientations were formed.

Representatives from these people's committees gathered in Seoul on September 6 and proclaimed the Korean People's Republic (KPR) with Syngman Rhee, who at that time was still in exile in the United States, as chairperson. The Korean People's Republic was a

mix of lots of very diverse political ideologies which embraced Communists and moderate leftists as well as conservatives and businessmen. According to their program the first reform that they want to implement was the confiscation of the land that belonged to the Japanese or to those Koreans who had collaborated with the colonial administration.

While the Korean people were busy working out a plan for the future administration of the country, on August 14 Soviet troops had begun landing on the northeast of the country, two days later were at Weonsan and by August 26 the Soviet Twenty-fifth Army entered Pyongyang. When the Soviet arrived found that locals in Pyongyang had set up a local council of twenty members of the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI) that was headed by a Presbyterian leader named Cho Man-sik and located in Seoul.

The Soviets worked together with the CPKI leaving Cho Man-sik in place while giving a share of power to some Communist leaders and on October 19 a Five Provinces People's Committee and a Five Provinces Administrative Bureau were set giving Cho Man-sik the lead of these institutions.

Moscow without refraining from supporting Communists sympathizers, worked together with members of other political parties. The Soviets brought into the country many Soviet-Koreans to help them in the administration and tried to, at least at a first stage, to ensure that the transfer of power from the Japanese administration to the new government would be carried out in a peaceful and organized way. At the same time they were looking for a strong and reliable Communist leader to place at the head of the local Communist party. The Soviets faced a problem as, at that time, it seemed there was no one suited for the leading of the Communist movement in the Korean peninsula. The local Communists headed by Hyeon Chun-hyeok were very weak and did not enjoy a widespread popularity among the local population, more palatable figures were far away in China, exiled during the Japanese occupation and fighting side by side the Chinese Communists.

At this point, a Korean officer of the Soviet army who was known to the Korean population as leader of a guerrilla movement that had

fought against the Japanese and was familiar with some members of the Soviet elite, came to be the most appropriate choice. His name was Kim Il Sung.

*“KIM IL SUNG, who was the commander of a Korean partisan detachment in Manchuria for 10 years and from 1941 to 1945 was commander of battalion 88 of the Special Brigade in the area of Khabarovsk, is in the city of Haeju. The name of KIM IL SUNG is known in broad sections of the Korean people. He is known as a fighter and hero of the Korean people against Japanese imperialism. The Korean people have created many legends about him, and he has indeed become a legendary hero of the Korean people. The Japanese used any means to catch KIM IL SUNG and offered a large sum of money for his head.*

*KIM IL SUNG is popular among all democratic sections of the population, especially among the peasants.*

*KIM IL SUNG is a suitable candidate in a future Korean government.*

*With the creation of a popular democratic front, KIM IL SUNG will be a suitable candidate to head it . . .*

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . .**

*9. Create a united bloc of democracy based on the Communist Party, the Democratic Party, the Democratic Union of Youth, the women's democratic organization, trade unions, and other anti-Japanese democratic organizations and place headed by Kim Il Sung, a national hero of Korea best-known and loved by all the people.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> "Soviet Report on Communists in Korea, 1945" 1945, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AGShVS RF. F. 172. OP 614631. D. 23 pp. 21-26. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114890>

## KIM IL SUNG, PROFILE OF A GUERRILLA FIGHTER

Collecting pieces from different sources and putting together a historically reliable biography of Kim Il Sung is something very challenging. After the rise to power of Kim, the North Korean propaganda did not spare any effort to repaint history with the colours of myth and the story of the Great Leader's personal life was turned into a hagiography. Thus, the attempt of sifting Kim's life out and separate fiction from reality is an arduous one but it is still worth the effort. The result can be what follows.<sup>4</sup>

Kim Il Sung was born on 15 April 1912 in the small village of Mangyeongdae near Pyongyang, his real name was Kim Seong-ju. His father, Kim Hyeong-jik (1894-1926), was a Korean intellectual, although not a renowned one, and during his life changed many occupations, sometimes a teacher, sometimes employed for some office jobs, he also practiced traditional herbal medicine. He earned enough to sustain his family although never to an extent to be considered wealthy. He and his family were Christians. Protestantism had arrived in Korea at the end of the nineteenth century and spread in the Northern part of the country during the colonial period. Kim Hyeong-jik went to a missionary school and often had connections with Christian churches and missions. The Christian background of Kim Il Sung family was depicted in the North Korean propaganda as a cover to hide Kim's political and revolutionary activities against the colonial administration.

Kim Il Sung mother was Kim Ban-seok (1892-1932), daughter of a local Protestant minister. Some reports refer to the existence of two other sons in the family, brothers of Kim Il Sung.

According to the North Korean official version of history Kim Il Sung parents were not only prominent figures of the anti-Japanese resistance, but his father was himself the leader of the movement. Despite the possibility that Kim's parents opposed the Japanese occupation, it is quite unlikely that they actually played any active role

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<sup>4</sup> Most of Kim Il Sung biographical information written here are found in: Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin To Kim Il Sung: The Formation Of North Korea, 1945-1960* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 49-76.

in the struggle for national liberation.

In 1920, for political or more likely economic reasons, the whole family move to Manchuria where Kim Il Sung, around eight years old at that time, attended a Chinese school. Kim became proficient in Chinese and spoke it fluently until the end of his days.

Six years later a fourteen-year-old Kim Il Sung lost his father when, in 1926, Kim Hyeong-jik passed away at the age of thirty-two.

While attending high school in Jilin, northeast China, Kim Il Sung joined an underground group of Marxist orientation which was set by a local youth organisation that belonged to the Chinese Communist Party. His militancy in the group caused Kim to be arrested by the police in 1929 and subsequently he spent several months in jail. He was seventeen years old and the youngest of the group, despite this, the North Korean propaganda will later untruly portray him as the leader and the founder of the organization.

After his release Kim joined a Communist guerrilla unit that operated in the area, he left school without having graduated. At that time many young Koreans and Chinese were active in different groups that opposed the Japanese rule, some of these were following Marxist ideologies, while others were simply nationalists who were fighting against foreign oppressors for the liberation of the country. What North Korean historiography tells us about that time is that a young Kim acted independently at the head of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army which he himself had created. In reality the Korean People's Revolutionary Army never existed. What the North Korea propaganda tried to do is to present Kim Il Sung under the myth of a national leader who has never been subject to any kind of foreign influence and that alone had freed North Korea from the oppression of the colonizers. For this reason the fact that Kim had been a member of the Chinese Communist Party since 1932 or that he had served in the Soviet Army during the Second World War are often hidden by the North Korean propaganda and never mentioned in the North Korean press.

Around 1935 Kim Il Sung started to use the name by which is commonly known and let his birth name of Kim Seong-ju fall into oblivion.

In the guerrilla group Kim had the chance to prove his value and, after the unit he was fighting for became part of the second division of the United North-Eastern Anti-Japanese Army, the future leader of North Korea was promoted to the position of political commissar of the third detachment with around 160 fighters under his command. His career continued to make progress and two years later, at the age of twenty four, he became the commander of the sixth division, also known as the division "Kim Il Sung". The division consisted of few hundreds fighters and can be considered a large guerrilla unit rather than a real army division.

The operation that made him famous was the raid on Bocheonbo, a small town on the other side of the Chinese-Korean border, inside the Japanese occupied Korea. The raid started on June 4, 1937, when around two hundreds men under Kim's lead destroyed some Japanese offices and the local police station. The operation lasted only for few hours and after the incursion the fighters withdrew and went back to the base. The raid had no decisive military significance but it was one of the first times that a guerrilla unit managed to cross the strictly patrolled Chinese-Korean border and break into the territory of the Japanese colony. The press spread the news all over the country and gave Kim Il Sung some kind of celebrity as the Japanese police put him on the list of the wanted revolutionaries and classified him as "particularly dangerous".

At the end of the 1930s Kim Il Sung met the a farmer's daughter who had been part of the guerrilla movement since the age of sixteen, her name was Kim Jeong-suk. It seems that Kim Jeong-suk was not Kim Il Sung first wife who instead appeared to have been a woman named Kim Hyo-sun, also a member of Kim Il Sung guerrilla group. Kim Hyo-sun was taken prisoner by the Japanese in 1940 and after her liberation she spent the rest of her life in North Korea working in the administration. However, according to the official biography, Kim Il Sung first wife was Kim Jeong-suk. Being Kim Jeong-suk the mother of who will become Kim Il Sung heir and North Korea's second ruler, Kim Jong-il, it is likely that the North Korean propaganda wanted to present her as the first wife of the Great Leader, hiding the fact that in reality she might have been only the



second wife.

In the late 1930s Japanese forces had been dispatched on the Sino-Korean border to suppress the increasingly frequent incursions launched by the guerrilla groups operating in the area, carrying out operations and raids become more and more difficult for Kim Il Sung who by that time had become the commander of the second operational region of the First Army. By 1940, the commander, the commissar, the chief of staff of the First Army and the commanders of three operational regions had perished under Japanese counteroffensives. Only Kim Il Sung remained alive and was constantly chase down by Japanese soldiers that forced him to withdraw. In December 1940 together with a dozen of his comrades crossed the Amur River and retreated into Soviet territory.

Defection to the Soviet Union was quite common and widespread among many guerrilla units that were operating in the area and that were looking for shelter to escape from the Japanese troops, whose presence in the region had increased massively since 1939.

Once inside the Soviet Union, guerrilla members were subjected to Soviet jurisdiction and had to undertake security checks. Some of them were recruited in the Soviet intelligence, others, accused of espionage were sent to labour camps, some of them simply took Soviet citizenship and went on living an ordinary life working in the Soviet Union.

Kim and his comrades too had to go through Soviet security checks but thanks to Kim acquired reputation as valuable fighter, he and his squad did not incur in any inconvenience and they were sent to the Khabarovsk infantry officer school where Kim studied until the spring of 1942. It was during this time, likely in February 1942, that Kim Il Sung wife, Kim Jeong-suk, gave birth to Kim Jong-il, future leader of the North Korea. Kim Jong-il took a Russian name and during his youth was known as Yuri.

The Soviets, in summer 1942, took the decision to put together all the Manchurian guerrilla squads and formed the Eighty-eighth Independent Brigade who had its headquarters in a village not far from Khabarovsk, known as Viatsk and was put under the lead of the commander Zhou Bao-zhong, a lieutenant-colonel of the Red Army

and a well-known former Manchurian guerrilla leader. Kim Il Sung was assigned to this brigade.

The brigade consisted of four battalions of 1,000-1,700 people in total, most of them were Chinese, about 200-300 were Soviet trainers and ideological instructors. Koreans and former Kim Il Sung own comrades who had fought with him in Manchuria were part of the first battalion which, under the lead of Kim himself, numbered around 140-180 fighters. The battalion operated quite far from the front line and in fact, during the war, Kim Il Sung was never involved in operations in Manchuria or Korea and spent those years relatively quietly while the official North Korea narration recalls Kim intense battles against the Japanese and stressed his decisive contribution in the final defeat of the enemy.

During those years Kim and his wife had other two children, a son and a daughter who both took Soviet names. It seems that at that time Kim's plan for his future was to pursue a career in the army, study at the military academy and maybe one day becoming the commander of a regiment or a division.

After the end of the war the Eighty-eighth Brigade was dissolved and its members, both soldiers and officers, assigned to other tasks. Most of the Koreans were employed in the cities of Manchuria and Korea that after the end of the war were temporarily under Soviet control. Their duties were mainly to help in the administration of the occupied territories and act as liaison between the Soviet personnel and the local population. Being the Korean national occupying the higher rank within the Eighty-eighth Brigade, Kim was sent to the largest Korean city under Soviet control, Pyongyang. Boarded the Pugachev, a Soviet steamship, Kim Il Sung, after twenty-five years spent abroad, had made his way back to his motherland and in late September 1945 arrived in Pyongyang.

As we have seen Kim Il Sung had some credentials that in the eyes of the Soviets made him a potential successful candidate in the race for the position of leader of the emerging North Korean state. He was known to the Soviets leadership having served in the Soviet army and his militancy against the colonial occupation gave him popularity among the Korean population, in addition he faced no substantial

competition as most of the other candidates were still fighting in faraway China. Shortly after his arrival, on 14 October, Kim was asked by the Soviets to deliver a short speech to celebrate the Red Army who had made Korea a free country. After that he joined the North Korean Bureau of the Communist Party of Korea of which became chairman in December 1945. In February 1946, with Soviet backing, he was placed at the top of the North Korea Provisional People's Committee which meant being in charge of governing the territory of the Korean peninsula under Soviet occupation.

Some accounts of Soviet officials who had known him personally recall how Kim was deeply unhappy with the choice of appointing him as head of the North Korea Provisional People's Committee. His plan was to pursue a career in the Soviet Army and disliked the world of politics which he found uninteresting and for which he felt was not prepared.

At the beginning his power was more nominal than real as most of the final decisions were taken by or under the supervision of the Soviet leadership. This initial influence of foreign powers in governing the country he was appointed to lead might have contributed to shape Kim vision of self-reliance and the formation of Juche ideology which stresses independence and autonomy from everything considered "non-Korean". As soon as Kim sensed it was the right time, he took the chance to distance himself from Soviet paternalism.

## ADMINISTERING THE SOUTH: THE UNITED STATES IN KOREA

When the United States had to decided how to handle the occupation and the administration of the southern half of the Korean peninsula, it clearly emerged how unprepared were the Americans for carrying out this delicate task.

Korea was not only a low priority matter in the American post-war agenda but had also always been a little known country even within the academic entourage of the United States. Korean language, history and society were something deeply plunged in a mist of

mystery and in Washington very few had a concrete knowledge of that culture.

When a decision on who will lead the occupation of Korea had to be made, Lieutenant General John R. Hodge was the man put in charge of it. Hodge was a military commander with no experience in civil affairs and even less knowledge of Korean matters. MacArthur chose him because on the day Japan announced its surrender, 15 August, 1945, he and the XXIV Corps under his command, being stationed in Okinawa, were the closest troops to the Korean peninsula and thus could arrive there earlier than any other American army force. Hodge and his troops arrived in Korea on September 8, a month later compared to the Soviets who already occupied the northern part of the country since early August.

Given American little knowledge of the situation in Korea is not surprising that the first policies carried out to administer the peninsula were not a success. General MacArthur, Hodge direct superior, was the head of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan (SCAP) and was ruling Japan through the same institutions that were in place in Japan before the defeat but that this time had to respond to the direct orders of the SCAP. MacArthur thought the he could adopt the same approach in the administration of Korea and with Washington approval gave to Hodge the order of keeping in place Japanese institutions and Japanese wartime governor. This decision did not take in consideration at all Korean people's long-time hatred for the Japanese rulers and manifestly displayed American unpreparedness in any Korea related matter. Korean people were expected to obey the very same people by whom they had been ruled oppressively since 1910. Governor Abe and the other 70,000 Japanese officials entrusted by Hodge were for the Koreans the symbols of thirty-five years of cruel colonial rule. Widespread discontent broke out among the population and the Americans were forced to remove Abe as early as September 12 and send him and all the other Japanese officials back to Japan. They were all repatriated over the next three months and power was transferred to the United States Military Government in Korea

(USAMGIK).<sup>5</sup>

Hodge and his associates need to find someone else to rely on for the administration of the country. They did not want to give power to the Korean People's Republic and the people's committees that had sprung up around the country since the very first days that followed Japanese capitulation as they feared they were infiltrated by communist elements and suspected that if given a chance they could overturn American occupation and hand in the country to the Communists. Hodge then turned to the more conservative elements of the Korean society, businessmen and landowners that on September 16 had formed the Korean Democratic Party (KDP). Hodge, beside an unjustified fear of a seizure of power by the communist forces, had different reasons to rely on the conservatives. Most of them were well-educated and had studied abroad, like in Japan or in the United States, and were among the few within the Korean population that could speak English and had experience in dealing with foreigners. Hodge faced a complete lack of staff able to speak Korean that could serve him as interpreters and therefore these American educated Koreans were the only mean of communication between the American command and the local population. The problem was that these same landowners and big businessmen had been able to maintain their interests by virtue of the fact that they had collaborated with the Japanese during the colonial time and were now prone to make good use of American need of their collaboration to influence important choices concerning political and economic reforms to benefit their own interests rather than the Korean society as a whole.

Hodge decided not to confiscate Japanese private properties, with the exceptions of those that belonged to the Japanese colonial government who were to be held in public trust. As a consequence, land, factories, firms previously owned by Japanese citizens were still under their control, this contributed to make the occupation regime of the United States highly unpopular among the vast majority of the Korean population.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Seth, *A History Of Korea: From Antiquity To The Present* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 311.

Convinced that working with the conservatives elements of the Korean society would better serve the interests of the United States, and suspicious of communist forces spreading around the territory, Hodge on October 10 declared that the Korean People's Republic had no political authority.

On October 16, Syngman Rhee boarded MacArthur private plane and, after many years spent in exile in the United States, landed in Seoul. On October 20 Rhee was presented by Hodge to the Korean public, a first clear sign of the support that the future Korean president received from the Americans.

Hodge also requested Kim Ku and Kim Kyu-sik, respectively president and vice-president of the Korean Provisional Government in China, to return and by November they were both back in Seoul. On December 18 the Korean People's Republic, the first and more spontaneous expression of Korean people's demand for an autonomous form of government and independence, was outlawed and ceased to have any involvement or relevance in the Korean political scene.

By the end of 1945 the political scenario in the southern half of the peninsula was like a puzzle where the single pieces did not match with each other. There were the Communists under Pak Hon-yong, the conservative Korean Democratic Party formed by a wealthy elite that included businessmen and landowners, moderate leftists, moderate conservatives under Kim Kyu-sik, radical rightists represented by Kim Ku and Syngman Rhee who, despite his conservative stance, preferred not to align with anyone and sponsored his own movement: the Committee for the Rapid Realization of Korean Independence.

In comparison, in the Northern part of the country under the Soviets, the situation was much less fractured and the provisional administration was carried out smoothly with the people's committees, communist forces backed by Moscow and non-Communists, mostly under the Presbyterian Cho Man-sik, working concordantly to govern the recently liberated territory.

## THE DISENCHANT OF DIVISION

On 27 December a conference that will have deep consequences for the future of the Korean peninsula started in Moscow. There the United States, China, Britain and the Soviet Union met to discuss the post-war settlement of some territories. Korea too was on the agenda.

The “trusteeship formula” previously proposed by President Roosevelt was upheld but its duration was considerably shortened, from those twenty to thirty years proposed at Yalta to five years.

Five years to the four powers seemed much more suitable to the Korean situation but in fact misunderstood the real desire of the Korean people whose request was that of immediate independence and ignored the fact that after thirty-five years of colonial domination the Koreans were very much opposed to any form of prolonged occupation of their territory by foreign troops of any country.

Protest and demonstrations broke out and the aversion to the trusteeship plan was so strong that it even managed to unite all the different political parties and movements operating on the Korean peninsula which for the first time saw some kind of unity and under the slogan of “immediate independence, no trusteeship”. Unfortunately for the Koreans their unity against the trusteeship was not long-lasting. The Soviet Union compelled the Communists to adhere to the trusteeship and they promptly followed the order of their sponsor losing support among the population in the South, at the same time Cho Man-sik, the most prominent non-Communist political figure in the North refused to give up to Soviet pressure and on January 4, 1946, was removed from office which meant that now the Communists faced no major political opposition in the North and could smoothly take control of all the institutions north of the thirty-eighth parallel.

During the Moscow conference in order to lay down rules and laws to implement the trusteeship, an American-Soviet Joint Commission was established and met in January 1946 in Seoul to hold preliminary talks about some key issues. Both the preliminary talks and subsequent meetings held in March and May proved to go

nowhere. The Soviets refused to accept any delegation from political parties that did not accept the plan of the trusteeship and this meant that virtually all the local political forces except for the Communists, who had obey to their Soviet patrons, were not taken into consideration.

One key issue was to establish freedom of movement across the thirty-eighth parallel where the Soviets had set up blocks to restrict the transit of people. Another main issue was that of lack of electricity in the South. Korea's economy was built and developed during the Japanese occupation to function as one body across the entire, united peninsula. The North of the country, rich in minerals and natural resources, hosted all the infrastructures of the heavy industry while the South with its warmer climate and wider cultivable surface was the source of agricultural and light industrial production. Almost all of South Korean electricity came from the North and the South in order to be able to function needed to ensure that energy supply would be provided by the North without discontinuity. An official letter from the Soviet Command in North Korea under Colonel-General Shtykov signed by Colonel Ignatev and Kim Il Sung sent to Lieutenant Hodge give us an idea on how the two halves of the peninsula, as early as January 1947, were already working as two different countries with the North asking the South to pay the electricity bill by hard currency or goods. In case of failure to pay the Soviet administration warned the American counterpart about possible power cuts. All this sounds more like international trade than ordinary administration of the economy within the same country.

*“Dear General!*

*The Provisional People’s Committee of North Korea informs you of the debt of South Korea for electricity, received from North Korean power plants following the capitulation of Japan. For the period from 15 August 1945 to the 1st of January 1947 South Korea received from North Korea 604,224,088 kilowatt-hours of electricity. At the rate from the 1st of July 1945, established by the company Joseon Denki Kabushiki*



*Kaisha [The Joseon Electricity Joint Stock Company] in the telegraph order No 1170 from 2 July 1945, the cost of this electricity, converted to American dollars according to the exchange rate from 1 July 1945, is \$4,240,261.51.*

*At present, South Korea does not make any payments for the provided electricity.*

*This arrangement has led to the economic downfall of North Korean power stations.*

*Due to the balance deficit, major repairs and equipment maintenance is not taking place, and there are great delays in the salary of the maintenance personnel.*

*If you are interested that South Korea continues to receive the regular, uninterrupted supply of electricity from North Korean power stations, please be so kind as to assist in providing compensation for the provided bill by February 10, 1947 and that timely payment is made on a monthly basis for future bills which will follow here forth.*

*If for one reason or another South Korea has difficulty making payments in American dollars, we are prepared to accept payment in the form of goods shipped from South Korea to North Korea. We will accept material and equipment necessary for the function of power plants, in particular: transformers, electric motors and lights, wire, insulation materials as well as rice, for the power plant employees.*

*I find it necessary to warn you that according to the transformer substation in Haeju, the maximum capacity of electricity that can be sent to Seoul is set at 50,000 kW.*

*In case the maximum capacity will be exceeded, the line running to Seoul will be shut off at the Haeju substation in order to prevent a system malfunction.*

*I ask you, comrade general, to inform us of your efforts to resolve this electric bill by means of a letter addressed to the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea.*

*In the event that the matter of the bill will not be resolved in the appointed time period, to our deepest regret, we will be forced to discontinue the supply of electricity to South Korea as of*

24:00 February 15, 1947.”<sup>6</sup>

When the Red Army arrived in the northern part of the country started to seize Japanese heavy and war industries as repayment for the damage inflicted by Japanese expansionism that dated back to the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905. Stalin wanted to make sure that the Korea peninsula will not be used again as a base to launch attack against the Soviet Union and his plan was to establish a friendly regime in Korea. A friendly regime did not necessarily mean that had to be rule by a Communist party but simply that would not pursue a hostile policy towards the Soviet Union. Stalin acceptance of the trusteeship showed that at least in the beginning he was willing to work out a solution together with the United States in order to lay down a plan for a unified Korean government that could accommodate both Soviet and American interests. However when most of the Korean political forces, especially those under the lead of Cho man-sik, opposed the trusteeship, the Soviets had few choices and started to rely solely on the Communists while pushing for a “Sovietization” of that half of the Korean peninsula under their control. On 8 February, 1946, they had established the North Korea Provisional People Committee through which reforms had to be put in place. The committee was supposed to be a coalition of different political groups but at the end were the Communists the force that was wielding power.

Japanese industries were nationalized and lands that belonged to Japanese owners or Korean collaborators were confiscated with private property allowed for surfaces below 5 *cheongbo* (around 50 square meters). This was in fact a redistribution of land that taken from the big landowners was given to rural families which constituted the majority of the local population. 25 percent of the crop was to be given back as a form of taxation.

The creation of social organizations was highly promoted and parts

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<sup>6</sup> "Letter to General-Lieutenant Hodge on Northern Korea Providing Electricity to Southern Korea" January 01, 1947, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsAMO, Fond not listed, Opis 480c, Delo 25, listi 22-23. Obtained for NKIDP by Kim Dong-gil and translated for NKIDP by Aleksandr Gorokhov and James Person. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114896>

of the Korean society that traditionally had had little influence or that had been always subject to a high degree of subordination from the elite, like farmers, workers and women, were now given the possibility to raise their social status and reach equality. Universal primary education was also part of the reforms.

In June 1946 the North Korean Workers' Party was created from the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party under the lead of Kim Il Sung who was joined by Kim Tu-bong and the other Communists who were beginning to come back from China where they were fighting along Chinese Communists against the nationalist forces of the Guomindang in the ongoing civil war. In August the first party congress of the North Korea Workers' Party was held and by February 1947 delegates from the local people committees formed the Congress of People's Committees and elected the People's assembly. Kim Il Sung with Soviet support was slowly but steadily consolidating his power and was emerging as the future leader of the country even though at that time he did not enjoy that unlimited power who will be able to exert from the second half of the 1950s.

Meanwhile, along the thirty-eight parallel, movement across the border was becoming more and more restricted and the northern half of the country slowly started to become increasingly sealed, with entrance interdicted to most of the common people coming from the South. The process of formation of a fully autonomous and independent state was already taking shape and future attempts to mediate a unified Korea under a central government will prove unsuccessful.

In the South the process of state building proceeded in parallel with that of the North and in August the United States Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) promoted the creation of an Interim Legislative Assembly of ninety members, half of those elected and the other half chosen by the USAMGIK itself. The leftist political forces boycotted the elections and a moderate conservative, Kim Kyu-sik, became the head of the Assembly. The Interim Legislative assembly was highly divided and never managed to reach a degree of unity sufficient to govern and legislate.

In addition to political factionalism the USAMGIK also faced deep

economic and social problems, with inflation and unemployment rising and refugees coming from China, Japan and North Korea the situation was far from ideal and discontent among the population was on the rise. A Korean National Police (KNP) was instituted to maintain public order and a paramilitary force which will later develop in what will become the South Korean Army came into existence. Most of the members of both police and paramilitaries came from the forces of public security employed by the Japanese colonial administration to keep control of the population and proved to be extremely unpopular among Korean citizens. When popular anger caused by economic difficulties and pressing demands for land reform brought strikes and uprisings around the country the police force did not refrain from repressing popular animosity with brute force, many were the victims. At the same time the National Police turned the repression of the riots in an occasion to sweep away all the left wing forces which were still rampant among the population and after the repression of the upheavals that broke out in Busan and Daegu during the fall of 1946 most of the Communists leaders were imprisoned or fled North of the thirty-eight parallel.

Syngman Rhee made good use of his popularity and prestige as national patriot to increase his power, championed the opposition to the trusteeship and favoured immediate independence gaining widespread support among the population. The American administration started to become increasingly uneasy with his extreme nationalism and authoritarianism and tried to look for someone that could better serve their interests. They first turned to Yo Un-hyong which had a more centrist orientation but his contribution was brief as on July 19, 1947, he was murdered by an unknown assailant.

Hodge second choice to challenge Syngman Rhee fell on one of the heroes of the movement for the independence that mostly opposed the Japanese occupation, So Jae-pil who arrived in Seoul in July 1947. An old man ill of cancer lacked the vigour to face Rhee in the ongoing power struggle and the following year he returned to the United States where he had been living in exile since 1885 and where he passed away on January 5, 1951.

Talks held by the American-Soviet Joint Committee were not going in a positive direction and any form of settlement for the Korean question was far from being reached thus in September 1947 the issue passed to the United Nations. The United Nations created an *ad hoc* committee called UN Temporary Committee on Korea (UNTCOK) which drew a plan to hold national elections all over the peninsula and elect a National Assembly that would take charge of governing the country with Soviet and American troops expected to withdraw.

In reality the implementation of this plan could not match with the interests of the parties involved. The Soviets were not ready to accept that an anti-Communist force won the election and established a new unfriendly regime right on the border with the Soviet Union. The United States did not want to take the risk of a Communist victory in the elections and thus having a Communist, pro-Soviet and likely anti-American state just in front of Japan which was meant to be the springboard of the American presence in the Asian continent.

Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sum themselves, who were quickly tightening their grip on power in their respective halves of the peninsula did not see elections that could weakened their position vis-à-vis their own rival in a favourable way.

The Soviet Union did not recognize the authority of the UNTCOK and did not give permission to hold elections in the North. As a result, elections were held only in the South on 10 May, 1948. Most of the Koreans boycotted them as they saw the elections as the final blow to a fully independent Korea but in the end a National Assembly of 200 members was elected with Syngman Rhee as its chairman. On July 17 a new constitution was adopted and on July 20 Syngman Rhee became the first president of the Republic of Korea which was proclaimed on August 15, 1948.

In the North a parallel path was followed and a Supreme People's Assembly was elected. On September 9, 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was proclaimed.

What everyone did not want and tried to avoid happened, the Korea peninsula was *de facto* divided in two separate, distinct countries

with two regimes promoting opposite political lines and taking an admittedly hostile attitude towards each other.

The road to a possible future conflict was well paved and ready to be run on.

## SOWING THE SEED OF FRIENDSHIP: CHINESE-NORTH KOREAN TIES BEFORE THE KOREAN WAR

If the years of the Korean War will testify the bloom of the Sino-North Korean alliance, the conditions for a future collaboration was already sown in the North Korea support to the Chinese Communists during the civil war against the nationalists of the Guomindang. North Korean assistance to the Chinese troops during the Chinese civil war was the seed of the friendship, Chinese support for the Korean comrades in the side by side struggle of the Korean War was its flower.

North Korean involvement during the Chinese civil war and Chinese influence in North Korean policy and ideology before the Korean conflict broke out is something that is still fairly unknown and seldom investigated by modern historiography. One of the reasons is the chronic lack of primary resources on the matter. Other factors are the historical approaches of some of the countries more directly involved. North Korean sources have always tried to hide Chinese influence in the political and ideological formation of the North Korean state in order to preserve the myth of Kim Il Sung as the only founder and pillar of the country. Given Kim Il Sung emphasis on the importance of indigenous elements in the formation of the state and his stress on self-reliance and estrangement from any kind of foreign influence it is not surprising that Chinese influence would not serve well the principle of Korean uniqueness.

The Soviets tried to limit Chinese influence in North Korea to hold a much stronger power of influence in the new born country and thus Chinese elements had to be introduced subtly to avoid Soviet resentment.

South Korean academic approach, especially in the early years, tent

to portray North Korea as a puppet of the Soviet mastermind and possibility of Maoist infiltrations in the North Korean apparatus were not considered as plausible.

American scholarship until the 1970s portrayed Communism as a uniform block of stone without relevant differences rather than notice its multiple faces given by the cultural, personal and geographical discrepancy in which the phenomenon put roots. Different leaders, in different regions, for different purposes held their own peculiar visions of Marxism and Leninism and thus the subject cannot be approached from just one side.

All this is to say that a significant quantity of Maoist blood runs through the veins of the North Korean ideology and society. Kim Il Sung himself became a member of the Chinese Communist Party in 1931 and had strong ties with the Chinese, sharing a common hatred against the Japanese invaders. The North Korean leader was also a fluent Chinese speaker, having attended Chinese schools and spent his youth in north-east China.

A key figure that brought Chinese influence in North Korea was Kim Chang-man, one of Kim Il Sung speechwriters, who from 1947 played a primary role in infusing elements of Maoism into North Korean propaganda and ideology.

Kim Chang-man was very able to smuggle Mao's words and thought inside Korean speeches, doing that in a way that the Soviets did not notice or did not find unacceptable. Mao's name in Kim's speeches was never mentioned as source of a new political thoughts but its invisible presence was palpable, on the contrary Marshal Stalin was seldom cited and his thought never faithfully copied by the North Korean leadership.

Maoist thinking of "being among the people, go among the masses, making policies in the interests of the people, living among the masses" became recurrent slogans in Kim Il Sung speeches and statements, one of these goes:

*"In all our party's practical work, correct leadership must be the leadership method of "from the masses, to the masses." This means taking the scattered, unsystematic opinion of the*

*masses, collecting them, systematizing them, and studying them, making their ideas into a system, and then going back to the masses to explain and popularize them, and make the masses take the ideas as their own and thus support them.”*<sup>7</sup>

These words are presented to us by the North Korean propaganda as Kim Il Sung own creation, originated from the same mind of the Korean leader but if we examine one of Mao's classics discussing the right approach that a just leadership should adopt when approaching the masses, we can read the following words:

*“In all practical work of our party, correct leadership can only be developed on the principle, “from the masses, to the masses.” This means summing up the views of the masses, then taking the resulting views back to the masses, explaining and popularizing them until the masses embrace the ideas as their own.”*<sup>8</sup>

The similarities between the two statements are striking. At the end of 1948 Soviet withdrawal from North Korea was completed and no Soviet troops remained on Korean territory, at the same time many of those Koreans who had fought side by side the Chinese Communists in the Chinese civil war started to come back. Along with their experience gained through many years fighting in China they brought back a great amount of Chinese influence too. Korean soldiers in China were fighting in different units mainly in Manchuria and Yan'an in Shaanxi province where Chinese Communist Party had reorganized after the Long March. By the late 1940s of all the various units formed by Korean soldiers, it remained only the Korean Volunteer Army (KVA) and the Yi Hong-gwang Detachment (YHD) named after a guerrilla fighter that died in Manchuria in 1935. The KVA was assembled around 1941 but until the end of the Second World War it counted no more than three to

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins Of The Korean War. Volume II. The Roaring Of The Cataract: 1947-1950* (Seoul: Yuksabipyungsa, 2002). 354.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



four hundred fighters.<sup>9</sup> In August 1945 when Korean soldiers enlisted in the Japanese army were freed to go back after the defeat of the Asian country in the Pacific War, they witnessed discrimination and violence perpetrated by the Chinese nationalist forces of the Guomindang against the Korean population in north-east China and most of them joined the Chinese Communists.

Kim Il Sung realized that if the Chinese Communists resulted victorious in the civil war he could have a precious friendly ally right along his borders vice versa a hostile and pro-Americans Chang Kai-shek on his back would result in a persistent threat to North Korean security. Mao's victory was fundamental for the future of Kim's regime and the North Korean leader started to supply tens of thousands of soldiers, raw materials, grain, food, dynamite, blasting fuses and opened the North Korean border to allow Communists force to withdraw, regroup and reorganize in case of necessity. Border towns of Sineuiju and Dandong became the centres of Sino-North Korean cooperation already in the late 1940s, decades before turning into focal points of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. The North Korean railways were fully operated to serve and support Chinese need and North Korean territory served as a safe zone for the Maoist fighters. Mu Chong who took part in the Long March together with Mao and Zhu De was in charge of the movement of goods and men across the border.

USAMGIK intelligence reported that by the spring of 1947 as much as 20 percent of Chinese forces fighting in Manchuria were made by Koreans. Under Kim Chaek alone were fighting no less than thirty thousand Koreans.

The Nord Korean leadership prospected a second benefit coming from the dispatch of troops to China, apart from a desirable Communist victory right beside North Korean territory. Fighting in the civil war constituted a precious training for Korean soldiers who, once the war was over, came back to North Korea as seasoned and trained veterans, elite troops ready to be employed in the unification

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<sup>9</sup> Most of the figure relating to Koreans fighting in China are taken from: Bruce Cumings, *The Origins Of The Korean War. Volume II. The Roaring Of The Cataract: 1947-1950* (Seoul: Yuksabipyungsa, 2002).

of the Korean peninsula. When the Yi Hong-gwang Detachment returned to Korea and joined the Korean People's Army in 1948, it numbered ten thousand soldiers in its ranks. Pang Ho-san was one of its generals, himself a member of the Chinese Communist Party since 1933 and commanded the People Liberation Army 166<sup>th</sup> division, constituted mainly of Koreans and it will later become the core of the Korean People's Army 6<sup>th</sup> division. The marrow of the Korean People's Army was made of veterans of the Chinese civil war and it is estimated that around 80 percent of its officers served in China. Some of them even went on fighting as far as Hainan Island in one of the last battle between Chinese Communists and nationalists in May 1950.

North Koreans with strong ties with China were also active in the policy making process, an example is interior minister Pak Il-u who had spent most of his life in China.

Korean soldiers made it back to their homeland in different waves, around 10,000 in February 1948, 30,000 to 40,000 from July to October 1949, 40,000 to 50,000 between February and March 1950, some of them were still in China when the Korean War had already begun. They brought back to North Korea their experience gained over many years on the battlefield, their fervent patriotism and also a good amount of Maoist influence.

*“According to the most recent statistics, there are around 16,000 ethnic Koreans on duty in various troops of the People's Liberation Army. Aside from ethnic Koreans dispersed throughout PLA divisions, there are also four battalions, twenty-seven companies, and nine platoons composed of ethnic Koreans.*

*On active duty, there are: two divisional, five regimental, eighty-seven battalion, 598 company, 400 platoon, and 1,900 squad commanders of Korean descent.*

*Within the ranks of the PLA they all are receiving training and education and, under the guidance of their Chinese comrades, have made much progress. From our military, many of these soldiers have gained experience in carrying out operations,*

*establishing armed forces, and launching political work. We feel most of them are fit to be cadres . . . At present the war is almost over. In the interests of the Korean people we should send these trained cadres back to Korea.”*<sup>10</sup>

With these formidable, well trained, toughen troops on the way back home from the battlefield Kim Il Sung could now start giving shape to his plan of reunification of the Korean peninsula. A united Korea had always been in his mind since the days of the guerrilla against the Japanese occupation.

It is likely that Kim Il sung actively support the Communists in China also to receive the favour back once in need. When Mao had to decide whether or not crossing the Yalu to support the North Koreans comrades and oppose the American troops, among all the considerations that the Chairman took into account, the memory of North Korean support during the Chinese civil war was certainly still vivid in his mind.

On 1 October, 1949, a triumphant Mao Zedong announced to a crowded, jubilant Tiananmen square the foundation of the People Republic of China.

Three days later North Korea proposed to establish diplomatic relations with the new-born Communist China and Stalin gave his approval.<sup>11</sup> On October 6 Zhou Enlai on behalf of the Central People's Government of the People Republic of China send a reply to the North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Heon-Yeong.

*“On behalf of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, I was pleased to receive your telegram of October 4th of this year notifying [us] of your*

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<sup>10</sup> "Telegram to Mao Zedong from Nie Rongzhen concerning the Repatriation of Ethnic Korean Soldiers to North Korea" December 29, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii (Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, APRF), fond.45, opis.1, delo. 334, listy. 8-9. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Kim Donggil.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114256>

<sup>11</sup> "Cable, from Stalin to the Soviet Ambassador in Beijing" October 03, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP archive.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119386>

*government's decision to establish diplomatic relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China. I now inform you that the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China warmly welcomes the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the immediate exchange of ambassadors."* <sup>12</sup>

On January 17, 1950, Yi Chu-yeon was appointed as the first North Korean ambassador to the People Republic of China.

## ROAD TO WAR

All the premises for a possible outbreak of a conflict between North and South Korea were in place well before the beginning of the main invasion in June 1950.

A typical Cold War time scholarship approach to the Korean War saw it as the expression of the Soviet Union evil plan to increase its influence in the free world. Kim Il Sung was portrayed as a puppet of Stalin, a tool in the Soviet leader hands to extend his influence over other territories without risking a direct involvement.

Today, thanks to new documents that emerged from Russian archives we know that the situation was in fact very different and it was rather Kim Il Sung insistence that lobbied Joseph Stalin to give him permission and assistance to begin an invasion of the southern part of the Korean peninsula.

Kim Il Sung was a staunch nationalist, when he was only a teenager he was already involved in anti-Japanese movements and struggle for national independence had been his daily lifestyle before becoming the leader of the North Korean state. He and his comrades, who shared with him the experience of the guerrilla days in

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<sup>12</sup> "Premier Zhou Enlai's Reply and Note on North Korea's Willingness to Establish Diplomatic Relations with China" October 06, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 106-00001-02, 7-11. Translated by Charles Kraus. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118619>

Manchuria, foresaw only one possible scenario for the future of the peninsula and its people: an independent, unified Korea, free from foreign occupation and home for all the Koreans who had always inhabited its lands. As soon as Kim consolidated his power as leader of the new state the unification of the peninsula was on the top of the list of his priorities.

On his part Syngman Rhee in the South was himself a hardline conservative and a militant anti-Communist. As leader of the newborn regime south of the thirty-eight parallel he was a promoter of an aggressive policy towards the North and it is reasonable to think that if successful in convincing American leaders to give him support for an attack against the North, he, and not Kim, would have been the first to move across the thirty-eight parallel to claim the unification of the peninsula under his name.

Soon after the proclamation of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, respectively on August 15 and September 9, 1948, the two regimes started a bellicose propaganda against each other. Press and media of the two countries did not spare energy to launch verbal attacks against the opposite regime. Kim Il Sung was depicted as the symbol of the communist menace, at the head of a wicked, red regime that kept the people of South Korea constantly under the sword of Damocles, a persistent threat to South Korean national security.

Syngman Rhee was then the American puppet par excellence, a treacherous, timeserving political leader that stood with the enemies to pursue his own personal interests to the detriment of the Korean people and national unity.

Both Kim and Rhee used the threat of an invasion from the enemy to tighten their grip on power and eliminate opposition. National security was regarded as an issue of primary importance, repression of criticism and hunt for dissidents were conducted on a daily basis. Police forces were given wider powers and a build-up of the respective armies began.

“In connection with plans for a military intrusion into the North, South Korean authorities are increasing the size of the “Army

of National Defense.” According to the reports of our agents, the South Korean Army has increased from 53,600 soldiers as of 1 January 1949, to 70,000 as of the end of the first quarter [of the year].

Special attention is paid to the technical, mechanical and special troops, which have grown by 2-4 times. Measures have been taken to purge the army of ‘unreliable’ soldiers and officers. Military units are being reinforced by reactionary-minded youths. Americans are transferring to the South Koreans a significant quantity of various types of weapons and ammunition. South Korean authorities are taking measures to receive weapons on a much larger scale . . .

South Korean authorities have concentrated a large number of troops in areas adjoining the 38th parallel.

According to the information received, the total number of troops in this area has reached 41,000 persons. The South Korean authorities are paying special attention to the Pyongyang direction.

According to the report of the commander of a South Korean battalion, who is connected to the North’s intelligence service, the number of troops in the Pyongyang direction will be increased to 30,000. The plans for the operation against the North have been worked out and in the first brigade they have already been passed to the battalion commanders. The actions are supposedly planned for the month of June. In connection with these plans the South Korean authorities are taking decisive measures to suppress uprisings in the South and to defeat completely the democratic movement.

Agents of the South have set up terrorist and subversive groups in every province in the North, which are ordered to recruit new members, conduct espionage, and draft plans for uprisings. In case military operations begin, they must carry out diversion, terror and organize an uprising. These groups receive grenades and guns from the South, and, as arrested persons confess, in May they will receive additional weapons.”

War was already under way for both sides. As early as May 1949 Mao Zedong, despite still being engaged against the nationalists over the final victory for the Chinese mainland, already mentioned the possibility of a North-South conflict and expressed his willingness to support Kim Il Sung with food, weapons and dispatching the Korean divisions still fighting in China.<sup>14</sup>

Kim Il Sung indeed appreciated Chinese readiness to supply the Korean People's Army in case of conflict but what the Korean leader needed was at least Stalin approval, at best Soviet military support. This was not an easy task and took Kim Il Sung time as the Soviet leader, after the enormous sacrifices of the Second World War, was resolutely against any form of Soviet involvement in any conflict and was very careful to avoid any kind of collision with the United States. Kim Il Sung, to change their mind, presented the Soviets with intelligence showing South Korean intention to attack the North and thus suggested that a pre-emptive strike from the North would be advisable:

*"On September 3 the personal secretary of Kim Il Sung, Mun Il (a Soviet Korean), came to me and at the commission of Kim Il Sung reported that they had received reliable information that in the near future the southerners intend to seize the part of the Ongjin Peninsula which is located to the north of the 38th parallel, and also to bombard the cement plant in the city of Kaisiu.*

*In connection with this, Mun Il said, Kim Il Sung asks permission to begin military operations against the south, with the goal of seizing the Ongjin peninsula and part of the*

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<sup>13</sup> "Telegram from Shtykov on Preparations for an Attack on North Korea" May 02, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, List III, pages 41-44. Translated for NKIDP by Kathryn Weathersby. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118662>

<sup>14</sup> "Soviet Report on the Results of Chinese-Korean Talks on Military Cooperation" May 18, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AP RF. F. 4. Op. 1. D. 331. pp. 59-61. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114898>

*territory of South Korea to the east of the Ongjin Peninsula, approximately to Gaeseong [Kaesong], so as to shorten the line of defense.*

*Kim Il Sung considers, Mun said, that if the international situation permits, they are ready to move further to the south. Kim Il Sung is convinced that they are in a position to seize South Korea in the course of two weeks, maximum 2 months.”*

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The Soviets recommended caution and tried to moderate Kim's haste. Regarding the matter as of utter seriousness, they asked Kim more information about the actual strength of the South Korean Army and whether or not there was the possibility of popular and partisan insurgencies in the South in support of the North. They also inquired about the possibility of an American intervention vis-à-vis a North Korean attack to the South.<sup>16</sup>

Kim decided to unveil his plan gradually and at first proposed to strike and seize the Ongjin peninsula to anticipate a supposed attack planned by Rhee's regime and only in case of advantageous conditions continue to move further south.

The Soviets were fairly skeptical and believed that even a quick strike to seize the Ongjin peninsula will turn into an all-out war. After China was lost to the Communist forces the Soviet leadership assumed that at that point the United States were going to make sure that the conservative regime of Syngman Rhee in South Korea was not going to fall in Communists hands like it had happened in China with the nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek and that an American intervention against Kim in case of aggression was foreseeable. Stalin and his comrades were deeply concerned by the fact that being Kim the first to attack this will present him as the instigator of

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<sup>15</sup> "Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky" September 03, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 4, papka 11, listy 136-138. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112129>

<sup>16</sup> "Telegram from Gromyko to Tunkin at the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang" September 11, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, list 45. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112130>



the war and will put him in a very difficult position towards the Korean people and the international community.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore they did not agree that the North Korean People's Army was strong enough to take the whole peninsula in few weeks or even in two months and before starting a military aggression more had to be done to make sure that the population in the South will support the Communist forces of the North with popular uprisings against Rhee's government.<sup>18</sup> At first even Mao Zedong, despite his willingness to supply the North Korean army in case of conflict, did not consider a military attack to the South advisable at that time.<sup>19</sup>

Despite a first refusal from the Soviets Kim Il Sung did not give up his plan for the unification of the peninsula. An independent united Korea was so entrenched in the North Korean leadership mind that soon or later something had to be done to bring once again the Korean people together under only one flag. No matter how many times he was going to be opposed in his plan, how many obstacles had to overcome to reach his goal, soon or later Korea will be one country under Kim's leadership. On the occasion of a luncheon held on January 17, 1950, for the departure of the Korean ambassador Ri Ju-yeon to the Chinese Peoples Republic and attended by North Korean, Soviet and Chinese top officials, the words of Kim Il Sung well expressed the urgency and the primary importance that the question of unification had for the North Korean leadership:

*"Kim, addressing the advisers Ignatiev and Pelishenko in an excited manner, began to speak about how now, when China is completing its liberation, the liberation of the Korean people*

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<sup>17</sup> "Telegram from Tunkin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Reply to 11 September Telegram" September 14, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, listy 46-53. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112132>

<sup>18</sup> "Politburo Decision to Confirm the Following Directive to the Soviet Ambassador in Korea" September 24, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, listy 75-77. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112133>

<sup>19</sup> "Draft Reply from Stalin to a Telegram from Mao Zedong on the Issue of Korea" October 26, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF. F. 45, Op. 1, D. 332, pp. 47-48. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114899>

*in the south of the country is next in line. In connection with this he said: "The people of the southern portion of Korea trust me and rely on our armed might. Partisans will not decide the question. The people of the south know that we have a good army. Lately I do not sleep at night, thinking about how to resolve the question of the unification of the whole country. If the matter of the liberation of the people of the southern portion of Korea and the unification of the country is drawn out, then I can lose the trust of the people of Korea.""*<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after, on that same occasion Kim Il Sung approached the Soviet officials and put pressure on them to secure him a meeting with Stalin to let him discuss personally with the Soviet leader the issue of the unification of the Korean peninsula. By the end of the month Stalin had agreed to receive Kim in Moscow to discuss the matter.<sup>21</sup> Kim planned to set off for Moscow at the beginning of April.<sup>22</sup> What is interesting though is that even before leaving for Moscow, Kim had already expressed his desire to purchase weapons and military equipment to be shipped as quick as possible.

*"In connection with the agreement of the Government of the USSR to allocate to Korea in 1950 a portion of the credit for 1951 in the amount of 70,700,000 rubles, the Government of the Korean People's Democratic Republic would like to acquire with this sum arms, ammunition and military-technical equipment for the Korean People's Army . . .*

*The Government of the Korean People's Democratic Republic hopes that the Government of the USSR, understanding well*

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<sup>20</sup> "Telegram Shtykov to Vyshinsky on a Luncheon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK" January 19, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, listy 87-91. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112135>

<sup>21</sup> "Telegram from Stalin to Shtykov" January 30, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, list 92. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112136>

<sup>22</sup> "Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinski regarding meeting with Kim Il Sung" March 21, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF, Listy 143-144, Fond and Opis not given; and AVPRF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, Listy 94-95. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112044>

*the needs of the young Korean Republic, will complete the delivery of all the special goods in the shortest period.”*<sup>23</sup>

It seems that Kim was already well confident of being able to convince Stalin to give him the green light to begin an attack to South Korea even before going to Moscow or that soon or later he would have launched his plan for the reunification of the peninsula anyway, with or without Stalin approval. Contrary to what most of the historians of the Cold War period tell us, Kim Il Sung was far from being a Soviet puppet, rather he showed independence and determination to go on with his plans, even alone, since his very first days as leader of the North Korean state.

Everything was set and agreed and Kim's trip to Moscow to obtain Stalin approval for his invasion of the South was prepared for March 30, 1950.<sup>24</sup>

What made Stalin change his mind regarding his approval for a North Korean attack against the South is linked to the international situation of those years. In August 1949 the Soviet Union had successfully tested its first nuclear device, in October China, against Stalin expectation, was in the end of the Communists. This reinforced the position of the Soviet Union and at the same time the establishment of NATO in Europe and the exclusion of the USSR from a joint administration of Japan installed in the Soviet mind the fear for a possible remilitarization of Japan. A united Korea under a Soviet friendly regime was the best option to counterbalance this ominous presage. By 1950 the Americans had withdrawn from Korea and a direct involvement of the United States in case of an attack to the South began to appear unlikely. All these factors contributed to change Stalin's mind regarding a North Korean attack to the South. Kim left Moscow with great satisfaction as he had obtained what he

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<sup>23</sup> "Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky" March 16, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF, Listy 133-140, fond and opis not given <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112042>

<sup>24</sup> "Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinsky regarding Kim Il Sung's impending trip to Moscow" March 24, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF, Listy 146-147, Fond and Opis not given; and AVPRF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, Listy 96-97. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112046>

asked for. Stalin gave him the permission to start an invasion with the only condition that the Korean leader obtained first Mao's approval and support.

Now that Chang Kai-shek and the Guomindang were defeated, Mao could carry out his plan of bringing China back to his ancient splendour, this time as the country leading the world proletarian revolution. The Chinese leadership knew that they need to show to the world that China was again a powerful country not afraid of facing superpowers like the United States and supporting Kim Il Sung in the Korean War would prove to the Communist block that China was in the front line in the struggle against the imperialists.

Moreover Kim had sent a large amount of Korean soldiers to support the Maoist struggle against the nationalists and had offered Korean territory and infrastructures as well as food and weapons to assist Chinese soldiers during the years of the civil war. Mao knew that somehow had to pay back Kim for his solidarity.

Kim presented Mao with Stalin approval to start an invasion of South Korea, for the Chinese leader it would have been unthinkable to put a veto on it. This would have meant a complete loss of trust and consideration in the eyes of the Soviet leader, on the other way, Chinese determination to back its allies and face the common enemies would reward China with future economic and military assistance from the Soviets and boost Chinese position and reputation among the international Marxist-Leninist movement.

By that time Mao Zedong already believed that a unification of the Korean peninsula by peaceful means was unfeasible and was confident in the fact that the Americans were not going to intervene and risk a Third World War for such a small country like Korea.<sup>25</sup>

On 13 May, 1950, Kim Il Sung went to Beijing to get Mao approval, the last piece to gather to finally assemble and begin his long-time plan for the reunification of the Korean peninsula.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Telegram from Shtykov to Vyshinski regarding meeting with Kim Il Sung" May 12, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF, Listy 151-154, Fond and Opis not given; and AVPRF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, Listy 100-103 <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112980>

<sup>26</sup> "Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin" May 13, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF).

In those days Stalin himself, under the pseudonym of Filippov, wrote to Mao to communicate him the new plan in regard to the Korean issue.

*“Comr. Mao Zedong!*

*In a conversation with the Korean comrades Filippov [Stalin] and his friends expressed the opinion, that, in light of the changed international situation, they agree with the proposal of the Koreans to move toward reunification. In this regard a qualification was made, that the question should be decided finally by the Chinese and Korean comrades together, and in case of disagreement by the Chinese comrades the decision on the question should be postponed until a new discussion. The Korean comrades can tell you the details of the conversation. Filippov.”* <sup>27</sup>

In few days Kim was back in Pyongyang, in his pocket both Stalin and Mao’s approval for an invasion of the South. Everything was set and all the pieces were in place, war was about to begin.

## KOREA VS KOREA

On June 25, 1950, shortly before dawn, the Korean’s People Army launched an attack against the South on the Ongjin peninsula. Soon after the North Korean Ministry of Internal Affairs transmitted by radio a report stating that North Korea had been attacked by the South. In this way the North Korean media depicted not the North but the

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<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112023>

<sup>27</sup> "Cable from Vyshinsky to Mao Zedong, Relaying Stalin's Stance on Permission for North Korea to attack South Korea" May 14, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The document, from the Russian Presidential Archives, was given by Russian President Boris Yeltsin to South Korean President Kim Young-Sam during the latter's visit to Moscow in June 1994, and was made available to CWHIP by the South Korean Embassy in Washington.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115976>

South as aggressor and instigator of the war.

*“Report of the DPRK Ministry of Internal Affairs.*

*Early on the morning of 25 June 1950, troops of the so-called ‘army of national defense’ of the puppet government of South Korea began a surprise attack on the territory of North Korea along the entire 38th parallel. Having begun a surprise attack, the enemy invaded the territory of North Korea to a depth of one or two kilometers north of the 38th parallel in the area west of [Haeju] and in the areas of [Geumcheon] and [Cheolwon].*

*The DPRK Ministry of Internal Affairs has issued an order to security detachments to repel the attacks of the enemy, which has invaded the territory of North Korea. At the present moment, the security forces of the Republic are stubbornly resisting the enemy. Security detachments of the Republic have repulsed attacks of the enemy, which has invaded the territory of North Korea in the area of [Yangyang]. The government of the DPRK has charged the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic with warning the authorities of the puppet government of South Korea that if they do not immediately halt their reckless military operations in the areas north of the 38th parallel, decisive steps will be taken to subdue the enemy and that they will bear full responsibility for all the serious consequences of these reckless military operations.”<sup>28</sup>*

The attack came as a shocking surprise for the Republic of Korea and the United Nations who few days later had sent a team to inspect the border and did not find anything that could rise any suspicion of an imminent military attack.

Unprepared and poorly equipped South Korean troops were no match for the tanks and heavy artillery of the North Korean People’s

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<sup>28</sup> "Report of the DPRK Ministry of Internal Affairs" June 25, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114909>

Army who could count also on the experience of thousands of veterans of the Chinese civil war. By June 28 the North Koreans had taken Seoul, capital of the Republic of Korea.

Contrary to Chinese and Soviet pre-war calculations the United States quickly decided to support their allies and turned the question to the United Nations. Taking advantage of the Soviets boycotting of the National Security Council who in those days were protesting against the refusal to give the seat held by Nationalist China to the new regime of Mao Zedong, the United Nations quickly passed a resolution condemning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. On July 7 a joint military command of sixteen countries under the lead of the United States was formed to support the Republic of Korea.

By August the North Korean forces had taken almost the entire peninsula with only a little area around the south-eastern city of Pusan still resisting. In August the United States, facing a desperate situation, decided to adopt MacArthur plan of an amphibious landing at Incheon, west of Seoul to cut North Korea's supply line and encircle its forces. Kim Il Sung troops taken by surprise started to lose ground and by September South Korean and American troops had retaken Seoul. Syngman Rhee and MacArthur refused to accept the *status quo ante bellum* and pushed for continuing the advance to completely defeat and crumble the North Korean regime. By the end of October they were in Pyongyang moving further North towards the Manchurian border.

China let the Americans know that it would not tolerate any presence of troops on its border but the message was dismissed and not given any credit. On November 27 the Chinese launched a massive attack against the Americans who outnumbered and overextended were forced into retreat. On January 4, 1951, Chinese troops marched into Seoul which again, on March 15, was retaken by the Americans after a successful counteroffensive pushed the Chinese troops back. In less than a year the city had been lost and retaken for an astonishing total amount of four times.

The conflict had reached a stalemate and all the actors involved signalled their willingness to hold talks which began in July. Unable to

find an agreement over the issues of prisoners of war, the conflict continued for two more years with the parties involved fighting on the ground while in parallel continuing the negotiations.

Stalin had little interest in ending the war being the Soviet Union not directly involved and using the conflict as a tool to drain Americans' resources and shift away their attention from Europe, to East Asia, an arena of secondary importance to the Soviet leader. In March 1953 the death of Stalin relieved pressure from the negotiations, talks could be carried out smoothly and an armistice was finally signed on July 27, 1953. The situation on the peninsula was basically the same of 1950. Despite three years of war, thousands of deaths and a country razed to ground the Korean people were still divided by that line running along the thirty-eight parallel.

The Korean War was firstly a civil war fought with the endorsement, and later also with the participation, of foreign and international actors. The war was the expression of the complicated situation created on the Korean peninsula by foreign powers' unpreparedness, mismanagement and lack of knowledge of even basic issues concerning Korean culture and Korean history. Foreign powers' unfit role in the management and administration of Korea was utilized by local actors both in the North and in the South to strengthen their power and gain control of the respective regime, fulfil their personal plans and policy and realized their respective dreams of a united Korea.

The conflict was the tragic evolution of a highly instable political situation. Skirmishes and clashes between the two armies, especially on the border area of the Ongjin peninsula, had been frequent and constant for at least one year before the beginning of the war to the point that in the eyes of Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee the conflict had already become inevitable well before June 1950. In fact it can be considered a pre-emptive war started by who had been the ablest to captivate his own allies and obtain approval and support for the pursuing of his plans.

The Sino-Korean relation lays its foundations in the years of the common antagonism towards the Japanese occupation and in the support offered by the North Korean regime to the Chinese



Communists against the nationalists but it was the Korean War that gave this relation its peculiarity of friendship and reinforced it to the point of being able to endure difficult times, survive the turns of history and still last nowadays. After the war, the experience of the joint struggle against the common enemy of the imperialists was constantly stressed in many speeches of leaders of both countries. Media, newspapers, art and architecture of China and Korea extensively contain references to the Korean War as the foundation of a special friendship “sealed in blood” and praise the joint Sino-Korean struggle as the highest example of socialist solidarity. What will follow in the post-war years of 1953-1958, with China providing economic aid and manpower to help in the reconstruction of North Korea, will further consolidate the relations between the two countries.

## 2. FRATERNAL ASSISTANCE AND POST-WAR

### RECONSTRUCTION, 1953-1958

In the summer of 1953 the Sino-North Korean collaboration is effectively described by a report of the Polish embassy in North Korea as follow:

*“ . . . the friendship of the Korean and Chinese nations, forged in the fire of the difficult struggle, a friendship confirmed by the fact of direct participation of the representatives of the Chinese nation in Korea’s liberation struggle is in its expression the strongest tie between nations fighting for a common cause.*

*People’s China and Their Leader Comrade Mao Zedong are the symbol of the power of friendship and sacrifice for every Korean.*

*The Korean nation knows and talks about the fact that People’s China is sending food, that People’s China has saved over twenty thousand Korean children by giving them shelter and care. The Korean nation knows that the Chinese volunteer is not only a soldier, sapper or airman, but also a friend who will fix a house, help to cultivate soil, repair tools and defend a Korean child, often saving it from bombs, and will give a part of his food rations to the Korean child and woman.*

*The sight of the Chinese volunteers, their fighting, moral and social attitudes, confirms the deep belief that the Great Chinese nation, out of which such people have sprung, is undefeated, and it will achieve total victory in its struggle and work and for a new socialist tomorrow.*

*The assistance given by the Great Chinese Nation to the nation*

*of Korea, its contribution to the Korean nation's liberation struggle, is one of the most beautiful stories of brotherhood and friendship of nations fighting for their independent existence and social liberation.”* <sup>29</sup>

Despite fraternal help from the Chinese comrades, at the end of war North Korea was the depiction of destruction. Most of all the industrial infrastructures built during the Japanese occupation had been raised to the ground by American bombers. Pyongyang, the North Korean capital city, laid in rubble and the whole country needed to go through a massive process of reconstruction.

As soon as the armistice was signed, Kim Il Sung launched his campaign to rebuild North Korea and began his quest for aid. In a time when the Marxist-Leninist world was still united and the various countries within it supportive of each other, Kim Il Sung could testify the real meaning of socialist solidarity when massive aid started to flow in to help him to recreate the North Korean state.

In September 1953 Kim Il Sung went to Moscow where he was granted the cancellation or either the postponement of North Korean debts, further loans in hard currency and in form of goods and industrial equipment. Soviet technicians were to be sent to North Korea to assist.

In November it was the time for a trip to Beijing and the North Korean delegation left for the Chinese capital on November 10.<sup>30</sup> China agreed to cancel North Korean debts from the Korean War and an agreement on cultural and economic cooperation was signed.<sup>31</sup> On 23 November 1953 Zhou Enlai for China and Kim Il Sung for North Korea signed an “Agreement on Korean Technical Personnel Receiving

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<sup>29</sup> "Report of the Embassy of the People's Republic of Poland in Korea " July 16, 1953, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Polish Foreign Ministry Archive. Obtained for NKIDP by Jakub Poprocki and translated for NKIDP by Maya Latynski. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114953>

<sup>30</sup> "Note from the Embassy of the Polish Republic in Korea" November 12, 1953, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Polish Foreign Ministry Archive. Obtained for NKIDP by Jakub Poprocki and translated for NKIDP by Maya Latynski. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114961>

<sup>31</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny Of The Weak: North Korea And The World, 1950-1992* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 56.

Training in China and Chinese Technical Personnel Working in Korea”.<sup>32</sup> Chinese aid to North Korea was remarkable and ranged from goods to equipment, manpower and cash.

*“The People's Republic of China has allocated 8 trillion yuan for aid to the DPRK. Taking into account that the prices for goods delivered to the DPRK by China are considerably higher than the export prices set for Soviet goods, according to USSR MVT [Ministry of Foreign Trade] data the aid allocated by China in the amount of 8 trillion yuan is approximately 850,000,000 rubles.*

*The PRC is also delivering consumer goods along with industrial equipment and materials (looms, locomotives, rail cars, coal, etc.). For example, in 1954 the PRC delivered 130,000 tons of grain (millet, beans), 40,000,000 meters of cotton fabric, more than 600,000 pairs of shoes, 300,000 sets of padded clothing, and other goods. Food and manufactured goods will be delivered from the PRC in 1955.*

*The People's Republic of China is also giving the DPRK aid in restoring railroads and the construction of railroad bridges and depots.”*<sup>33</sup>

What probably had been the most valuable and highly symbolic contribution given by China to North Korea was the manpower provided by troops of the People Liberation Army who stayed in the country until 1958. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers helped on daily basis reconstructing and repairing schools, roads, tunnels, rail lines, bridges, irrigation dams. Their work side by side

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<sup>32</sup> "Agreement on Korean Technical Personnel Receiving Training in China and Chinese Technical Personnel Working in Korea Made by the Governments of the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" November 23, 1953, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Hebei Provincial Archives 908-1-17. Pp. 40-41. Obtained for NKIDP by Shen Zhihua and translated for NKIDP by Jeffrey Wang. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114168>

<sup>33</sup> "Information on the Situation in the DPRK" April, 1955, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 314, listi 34-59. Obtained for NKIDP by James Person and translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114590>

local Korean citizens and peasants contributed to create an image of friendship and fraternal assistance and strengthen the image of the People Republic of China not only in the high sphere of the political entourage but also among the local population. The importance of the contribution offered by the Chinese volunteers was even noticed by some foreign embassies that stressed how that help was of primary importance in the reconstruction of a country in a situation of great shortage of labour force.

*“ . . . many of the most important construction [projects] were done or re-done by Chinese volunteers. Their assistance is extremely important. They are contributing to the rebuilding of roads, they work shoulder-to-shoulder with North Korean peasants – when there are not enough workers.”* <sup>34</sup>

The contribution of the Chinese volunteers was so appreciated that when they left in 1958 their departure was extensively covered by North Korean media and Kim Il Sung himself in a conversation with Chinese premier Zhou Enlai recalled that on the day of the departure of the Chinese volunteers, almost every Korean cried in sign of affection.<sup>35</sup>

Chinese generosity not only generated from a genuine feeling of friendship and comradeship, instead it is easy to assume that the decision of providing such a consistent amount of aid, especially in a time when China itself was in need of support to recover after the loss suffered during the war, originated from the will to compete with the Soviet Union over future influence on North Korea. The Chinese

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<sup>34</sup> "Report from the Romanian Embassy in Pyongyang to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Activity of the Embassy, September 29, 1954, written by comrade Victor Florescu, Second Secretary of the Romanian Embassy in Pyongyang" September 29, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Year 1955; Issue 20; Country: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Eliza Gheorghe. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115539>

<sup>35</sup> "Minutes of Conversation between Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and North Korean Prime Minister Kim Il Sung" November 27, 1958, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA Document 204-00064-02 (1). Obtained for NKIDP by Gregg Brazinsky and translated for NKIDP by Mengyin Kung. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113694>

leadership was well aware of the strategic importance of a friendly ally right on its border that could serve as a buffer against a United States-friendly South Korea and Japan. If the Soviet Union was the uncontested leader of the Socialist movement in Europe, China aimed at becoming the lead for all the countries in Asia that looked with interest at the Communist recipe of development. In other words, a mixture of pragmatic geopolitical strategy and genuine socialist solidarity brought China to be the second most important provider of aid for the reconstruction of the North Korean state.

The Soviet Union and China provided the bulk of economic aid and assistance but many Eastern European countries also played an important role in the reconstruction of North Korea as shown in the table below.

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Foreign Assistance from Socialist Countries to DPRK, 1953-1960 (in rubles) <sup>36</sup>

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Soviet Union	292.5
China	258.4
German Democratic Republic	122.7
Poland	81.9
Czechoslovakia	61.0
Romania	22.0
Hungary	21.0
Bulgaria	18.7
Albania	0.6
Mongolia	0.4
North Vietnam	0.1
TOTAL	879.3 million

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As we can see the Soviet Union and China contributed respectively for about a third of the total amount of aid. Some Eastern European

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<sup>36</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny Of The Weak: North Korea And The World, 1950-1992* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 57.

countries like Romania and East Germany helped North Korea giving asylum to thousands of Korean war orphans who returned to their homeland by the end of the Five-Year Plan of 1957-1961.

In their plan for the reconstruction of the country the North Korean leadership decided to give priority to heavy industry given the fact that industrial infrastructure existed since the Japanese occupation, even though most of it was destroyed during the war. The final aim was to reach self-sufficiency and autarky rather than build an economy integrated with the other countries of the socialist block. The North Korean population was channelled in the effort of the rehabilitation of the country and every single aspect of the daily life of a citizen was to be put at the service of the state. This massive employment of the whole population together with the gargantuan foreign aid that flowed into the country after the war contributed to the miracle of an ultra-fast recover. Pyongyang was once again a proper capital city by mid-August 1955. The speed of the reconstruction was so high that the expression of “Pyongyang Speed” was coined to describe the little time needed to rebuild houses. In February 1958 housing for seventeen thousand families was constructed in twelve days, with ready-made parts and an assembly line of workers a single apartment could be erected in fourteen minutes. Materials enough for the construction of seven thousand apartments were utilized to build twenty thousand.<sup>37</sup> Time for quality was sacrificed to speed and up to twenty families could be living together sharing a single bathroom and a kitchen.

Kim Il Sung meanwhile made good use of the frenzy of the reconstruction and of the complete mobilization of the population to strengthen his leadership and get rid of the opposition. Many party cadres within the Workers’ Party were purged and Kim tried to eliminate some of the senior figures of North Korean politics that could challenge his leadership. His attacks were directed at those who had strong ties with the Soviet Union or China. Kim wanted to restrict the leading entourage to those comrades who had been with

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<sup>37</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny Of The Weak: North Korea And The World, 1950-1992* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 69-72.

him since the time of the guerrilla in Manchuria and whom he felt he could trust. These continued purges caused great discontent among Chinese and Soviet leadership and within the party as well and led to the "August Incident".

During the summer of 1956 Kim Il Sung and a delegation of officials left for a trip to Moscow and East Europe to discuss further economic assistance and other issues. During Kim's three weeks absence his opponents conspired against him to put an end to his undisputable personal leadership. Yi Sang-cho, Korean ambassador to Moscow asked the support of the Soviet Union to back the coup, but the Soviets did not want to risk losing a leader that, despite persistent claim of wider autonomy, had been consistently showing a friendly attitude towards Moscow. At the end of August at the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee plenum Kim was attacked in different speeches and his rising personality cult and one-man leadership criticized. His opponents miscalculated Kim's domestic and foreign backing and found themselves isolated against a leader that was enjoying great support. The conspirators were expelled.

To avoid the escalation of the purges, China and the Soviet union decided to intervene and sent to Pyongyang a delegation led by Mikoyan and Chinese Defense Minister Peng Dehuai. The two foreign delegates told Kim to reinstate the expelled members and cease the attack against the pro-Soviets and pro-Chinese members of the Korean political establishment. An annoyed Kim Il Sung agreed only in part, members expelled were reinstated but at lower positions and the accident as well as the meeting were kept secret. In few months the purges started again and by the end of 1950s Kim's grip on power was tighter than ever. If even a joint Chinese-Soviet delegation was not able to mitigate Kim quest for autonomy, no other political opponents would have a chance to challenge his rule. After the August Incident there will not be other attempts to challenge Kim Il Sung undisputable role as supreme leader.

The intervention of the Soviet Union and China in North Korean domestic politics bring discontent to Kim that for a while held grudge on both his allies. Despite dissatisfaction with this attempt to interfere



in his own domestic affairs, Kim will soon be able to play the rising antagonism between Moscow and Beijing to his own advantage forcing the two communist giants to respect Kim's decisions without interfering. Both China and the Soviet Union were too afraid to lose a precious ally to the enemy to risk any form of dissent in regard of Kim's way of governing.

China intrusion in North Korean internal affairs as shown in the August Incident did create some frictions between the two allies but because it was an isolated episode that in fact did not occur again, caused no harm to the relations between the two countries who had foundations solid enough to overcome little misunderstandings of this kind. China was an important political ally and a fundamental provider of economic aid that North Korea needed for its own survival. North Korea was a strategic partner for China at geopolitical level. Especially after the Sino-Soviet rift started to become increasingly bitter, China could not let North Korea taking side with its new found enemy, the Soviet Union.

Joint war effort against the United States, fraternal assistance in the reconstruction of the country after the war and geopolitical interests laid the foundation of an alliance that remained firm and stable until the late 1960s when the rising of the Cultural Revolution in China gave Kim Il Sung hard times in dealing with his old time ally and neighbour.

Mao Zedong's speech at the banquet for the North Korean delegation visiting China in November 1953 well summarizes the relations between the two countries in those years and for the next decade.

*“The peoples of our two countries were united during wartime. We were also united prior to the [Korean] War. The war [simply] further consolidated the unity between the peoples of our two countries . . .*

*Millions of Korean people carried out a heroic struggle for three-years; [but] they paid a heavy price in beating back the imperialist's invasion. Their victory is an international victory,*

*and it is a victory that people all over the world care about.*

*Today we announced the signing of the Economic and Cultural Cooperation Agreement between our two countries. The cooperation [embodied in the agreement] has the character of mutual assistance. We will help the Korean people recover economically; and once the Korean peoples' economy recovers, then they will assist us. Because they [the Koreans] are situated at the first line of defense and we are situated at the second line of defense, [we] are the rear area. Therefore, [just as] the Korean peoples' victory in war was of assistance to us, their economic recovery is also helpful to China. The recovery of each of their factories and the recovery of each of their villages is closely related to us. They have paid a heavy price in both manpower and material, but the result of their struggle has greatly aided us.*

*I propose to drink to the health of Premier Kim Il Sung and the comrades of the government delegation of Democratic People's Republic of Korea!"* <sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Mao Zedong's Remarks at the Banquet for the North Korean Government Delegation" November 23, 1953, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRCFMA 203-0003-01. p. 1-3. Obtained for NKIDP by Shen Zihua and translated for NKIDP by Jeffrey Wang. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114167>

### **3. IN SEARCH OF BALANCE: KIM IL SUNG IN THE SINO-SOVIET RIFT, 1959-1964**

#### **FROM BROTHERS TO ARCHENEMIES: RISE AND FALL OF THE SINO-SOVIET ALLIANCE**

Since the end of the 1940s, when Mao and his comrades' control over increasing portions of Chinese territory and the victory in the civil war against the troops of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) appeared to be near, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party had the perception of an international scenario divided in two different blocks headed respectively by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Of the two blocks, the one headed by the Soviet Union was clearly much more consistent with Mao's idea of revolution and his lean-to-one side approach had indeed deep roots in the vision of common struggle against imperialism, capitalism and support for an international proletarian movement. Nevertheless Mao's choice of leaning-to-one-side had also other reasons, based on the threats for China that the Chinese leader perceived and on the plan that he envisaged for the newly born People Republic.

Chinese leaders had a persistent feeling of a possible foreign military intervention, in particular by the US, against the People Republic. Foreign intervention could jeopardize a successful outcome of the Chinese Revolution. If seen through the prism of a realist approach, this security dilemma played an important role in shaping Mao's decision of alignment with the Soviet Block.

Taking into consideration a shared ideology with the international proletarian movement and the need to rest under the security umbrella provided by the alliance with the Soviet Union, is not enough to have a full picture of Mao's mind-set at the beginning of his "adventure" as Chairman of the People Republic of China.

We need to keep in mind Mao's effort to maintain vitality and

dynamism in China's own revolution in a moment of triumph. Like a "Son of Heaven" from the imperial era, the Chairman felt he was bestowed the mission of first demolishing the "old" Chinese world and society and then rebuild a new China out of the ashes of the old one. It had to be a new China ready to redeem itself from a time in which it had constantly been exposed to the dishonour of foreign occupation and painfully existed at the mercy of Western imperialism.

Justice and equality would finally triumph under the banner of the Chinese Revolution, all the oppressed nations of the world would follow the lead of this new harmonious society and China will finally retake its place at the centre of the world and at the core of the international scenario as a reborn "zhongguo", becoming once again the central empire.

In 1949 Mao, on the wave of triumph after the successful defeat of the nationalists of the Guomindang, had the persistent fear that the revolution would lose its momentum and tried hard to convey his and Chinese People's effort to carry on the revolution until the final stage. To pursue this goal Mao was convinced of the need of an alliance with the Soviet Union, the first socialist country and the first example of an attempt of building an equal and just new society. In order to wash out from Chinese people minds, especially the one of the intellectuals, the belief that China needed assistance from the Western capitalist countries Mao was convinced of the need to lean-to-one-side, the Soviet Block.

What follow was, especially for China, a lucrative, even though short lived, alliance.

On February 14, 1950, Mao finally obtained what had been hoping for years, a treaty of alliance with the Soviet Union that would provide China with military and economic aid. Despite the achievement of the final result Mao did not find enjoyable at all the way his meeting with the Soviets went on.

Mao felt very uneasy over how Stalin dealt with him, as a little brother to be taken care of and a child to be nurture. The Chairman always suffered deeply the fact of not being able to be treated as an equal

and make the Soviet leader considering him and China as an ally on the same level rather than a subordinate. The first seed a future discomfort was sown in the soil of the alliance since its first start but it would take another six years for it to bloom in what would turn to be an open rivalry between the two Communist giants.

In October the outbreak of the Korean War test the depth of Sino-Soviet alliance vis-à-vis a very serious situation in the international arena like the conflict in the Asian peninsula.

The Korean War was Kim Il Sung war and if it had not been for his insistence and continuous requests to obtain Stalin approval for the invasion of the South, the Soviet leader would not have started a new conflict.

Soviet sacrifice during the Second World War had been colossal and in the emerging bipolar confrontation with the Western countries Stalin was always careful of trying to avoid any possible direct confrontation with the United States. This constant fear of direct involvement with the United States played a major role in the Soviet Leader hesitation in providing full military support to the North Koreans first and the Chinese later during the Korean conflict.

From the point of view of Mao, Stalin “parsimony” was seen as pure selfishness. For the chairman, Stalin was only keen on pursuing Soviet Union national interests and the world revolution could at best be a tool to bring advantages to the USSR cause rather than to the world communist movement. For a man like Mao, to whom ideology played such a fundamental role, this kind of hyper-realistic approach to international politics was of great displeasure.

A different way of seeing and approaching common problems was starting to crack an already fragile relationship.

What made the Chinese even more disillusioned about Stalin real commitment in supporting international socialism was the fact that once the war was over the Soviets asked China to pay back for the military aid received, showing the cynicism of a merchant rather than the unconditioned support of a brotherly comradeship. This will contribute to make Mao and the other members of the Chinese politburo feel a sense of moral superiority compared to the Soviets

and thus entitling the Chinese to be regarded as more real and genuine leaders and better promoters of the Marxist-Leninist principle.

Mao's intervention in the Korean War was a considerable boost to the Chairman international reputation as fervent supporter of the proletarian movement. Mao through his support to the Korean comrades indeed gained a better consideration in the eyes of Stalin but what we can consider the biggest contribute that the Korean conflict brought to Mao was the possibility of mobilize the people of China and refuel China's domestic revolution.

The regime in China made use of the international crisis caused by the war in Korea to penetrate at every level of Chinese society with the excuse of weeding out counter-revolutionary tendencies, promote land reform, chase down suspected bourgeois and suppress any form of dissidence to the party.

After the war a new scenario could be seen inside China: land had been taken away from former owners and redistributed, party members who had shown signs of disagreement with the party's policies had been purged or re-educated and the Communist party strengthen its influence in every aspect of Chinese population's daily life.

As the Chinese intervention in the Korean war came out under Mao's pressure over the other comrades, pushing his decision of intervention until the end and having the Chinese troops been successful in driving American and United Nations soldiers away from the Chinese-Korean border and down again to the thirty-eight parallel, the Chairman could claim a great victory both domestically and internationally. His position and authority within the party became stronger than ever and his decisions more and more unquestionable.

On March 5, 1953, the Soviet Union cried the departure of its leader and ruler Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin.

For Mao it was the demise of a figure with who the Chairman had always had an uneasy relation, the Marshal when dealing with the Chinese, never considered him on an equal level and this feeling of

constant subordination gave much suffering to Mao's personality.

Stalin's death must have felt for the Chinese leader as getting rid of a heavy burden which would have been difficult to bear for longer time and now he felt it was his time to take the place of the Soviet as leader of the world proletarian revolution.

Nikita Khrushchev, the new First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, saw China as a fundamental strategic ally in the confrontation with capitalist countries and had all the intentions to treasure the relations with the Asian communists. Unlike Stalin "stinginess", Khrushchev wanted to show Soviet generosity and willingness to strengthen and deepen cooperation with China.

From September 29 to October 12, 1954, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the founding of the People Republic of China and to pay homage to Chairman Mao, the new Soviet leader went to Beijing followed by a top-level delegation of Soviet officials and party members. The fact that it was Khrushchev to go to Beijing and not Mao visiting Moscow, together with level of the delegation that follow him in the trip, shows the importance that the Soviet leader attached to the alliance with China. At the same time having the leader of the Soviet Union flying up to Beijing to honour the foundation of the country contributed to shape Mao's opinion that not only he and China itself were not any more a subordinate of the Soviet Union but also that the Chairman himself was destined to take the lead of Communism.

The visit resulted in a flow of aid and concessions to China finalized with the signing of a series of agreements. Soviet would return to China naval bases in Lüshun (Port Arthur) and Dalian, located on the Southern tip of the strategic Liaodong peninsula, as well as its military equipment. Soviet shares in major Sino-Soviet joint ventures, among them the Changchun Railway, were now Chinese owned. Loans for a total of 520 million rubles and technological assistance to initiate or upgrade 156 key industrial projects for the First Five-Year Plan were granted.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chen Jian and Yang Kulsong in *Brothers In Arms: The Rise And Fall Of The Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, edited by Odd Arne Westad (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 257.

On top of that, in April of the following year Mao reached an agreement to receive from Moscow nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Soviet aid to China became history's biggest foreign assistance program from one country to another.<sup>40</sup>

From 1953 to 1955 relations between China and the Soviet Union were indeed defined by enthusiasm and close cooperation not only in term of Soviet aid toward China but also, on a larger scale, in international politics as it shows the participation and common strategy at the Geneva Conference of 1954, where on the table were the future of Korea and Vietnam.

The two communist allies carried out the talks on the track of a coordinated tactic based on daily consultations and shared intelligence information and they acted together to convince the Vietnamese communists to accept, despite their hesitation, the division of their country along the seventeenth parallel as first step to reach a final settlement in the future and avoid the stalling of the talks.

The alliance during these years served the interests of both of the parts involved. Khrushchev needed support to consolidate his leadership and a viable ally in the Asian arena, China, after years of wars with Japan and with the nationalist party of Chiang Kai-shek was in desperate need of economic aid and assistance in any field in order to start the reconstruction of the country and break its international isolation. Mao's interests well fitted with what the alliance with the Soviet Union could offer in those years.

Despite a reciprocal positive attitude in these years some signs of mistrust were already perceivable, firstly due to Mao's uneasiness in being regarded as unequal ally. Mao's bitterly accepted subordination to Stalin but after the death of the Soviet dictator he was not willing to accept any kind of discrimination from a leader, Khrushchev, whom the Chairman considered much less authoritative and sophisticated than Stalin.

Mao, even though ready to cherish the alliance with Moscow, from

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<sup>40</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China And The World Since 1750* (Basic Books, 2012), 252.



now on would not tolerate any interference in what he regarded as internal affairs of the People Republic of China. This can be clearly seen in the management of the Gao Gang affair. Gao Gang was the vice chairman of the Central Government and had always been a figure considered very close to Moscow with which he had strong ties. Since December 1953 he became the target of an intra-party factionalism dispute, probably caused by his old rivalry with Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai and in August 1954 he died, apparently committing suicide. Considering that Gao Gang enmity with other party members dated back to much earlier than 1953 it is striking the fact that Mao waited Stalin death to proceed with his purge, and it is easy to believe that with the change of leadership in Moscow the Chinese leader finally felt free to handle Chinese politics relying solely on his own judgement and without taking into consideration Moscow opinion.

After Gao Gang's death, two weeks passed before Mao notified the Soviets of Gao's alleged sins. This emerging mistrust and lack of communication will become more blatant in the following years, especially from 1956, and did much to wear out the tissue of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

1956 was the first real turning point in the relations between the two countries. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, the last day of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it was announced that a last unscheduled session would be held for the Soviet delegates. During what is known as Khrushchev's "secret speech" the Soviet leader to the great surprise of most of the participants openly attacked Stalin and his reign of terror, his *modus operandi* based on physical annihilation and mass killings, and strongly criticized his cult of personality.

Mao might have welcomed a critique toward Stalin, with whom the Chairman had always suffered a feeling of subordination, but the way the speech broke out could not be accepted by the Chinese leadership. The Chinese blamed the Soviets for not having invited their delegation to take part at the session and for not having provided a copy of the speech, even worse was the fact that they

have not been consulted in advance on the issue.

Mao did not like the fact that accusations to Stalin did not mention wrong policies towards China but what the Chairman thought even more dangerous was that the speech had been leaked to the West. A speech of this kind could have the power of shaking world communism from the base up the top and threaten the same survival of the proletarian revolution itself. Uprisings in Poland and Hungary later that year proved the Chinese leader right, and only Soviet tanks managed to tame angry requests for reforms and more democracy in East Europe.

Disapproval of the cult of personality also did not fit in Mao's plans. At home the Chinese himself envisaged the building of his own cult of personality that will reach the peak in the second half of 1960s, during the years of the Cultural Revolution.

Moreover, despite Mao's uneasy relation with Stalin, he still attributed to the Soviet leader a central role in the promotion of Marxism-Leninism and even if Stalin had committed some mistakes, he was also able to reach great achievements, with the latter surpassing the former. Stalinism had also been a model to apply to the ongoing Chinese revolution and even though it did not fit perfectly in the mould of the Chinese society it was still a source of inspiration in the difficult task of forging a new and just proletarian state. In other words Mao and his comrades were not ready yet to accept a full scale de-Stalinization and even less to welcome Khrushchev as Stalin heir.

In Mao's own perception, now he was the one endowed with a superior morality in terms of Marxist-Leninist affairs and thus he was the only one entitled to be the helmsman of the world revolution after the departure of its previous leader.

In October 1956 protests broke out in Poland and Hungary with riots storming through the streets and people opposing the Soviet backed local governments. The Soviets informed the Chinese allied of their plan to intervene with troops in Poland. Mao considered this intervention as an intrusion in Poland's internal affairs and as a manifestation of latent Soviet imperialism and opposed Moscow decision. Liu Xiaogi and Deng Xiaoping were sent to Moscow to

express China criticism and lack of support for Soviet military intervention and contributed to change Khrushchev's mind. Negotiations with the Poles replaced a planned military attack.

Apparently similar but with completely different outcome was the situation in Hungary. This time the Soviets were not planning a military intervention to suppress the revolt, on the other hand the Chinese saw the need to bring in the troops.

What was, in Mao's perception, the difference between the two crisis?

The uprisings in Poland were considered mainly as an expression of dissatisfaction towards the Soviet Union only and thus any retaliation from the Soviets would have looked like superpowers chauvinism. On the other hand the Chinese considered the protests in Hungary as explicitly anti-communist thus not intervening would have meant abandon and betrayal of the world revolution, leaving the Hungarian people at the mercy of capitalism.

Once again, following Mao's instructions from Beijing, Liu and Deng lobbied the Soviet leaders and convinced them of the need of direct military intervention in order to rescue world Communism. On November the 4<sup>th</sup> Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution in a bloodbath.

During their meetings in Moscow, Deng Xiaoping, Liu Xiaoyi, and Zhou Enlai often reported to Beijing about the poor managing skills and lack of sophistication of the new Chinese leadership, Khrushchev in particular, and contributed to instil in Mao an even worst consideration of the Communist ally.

1957 was a crucial year for a new trend in Sino-Soviet relations as Khrushchev tried to fit his relationship with China in his new mould of foreign policy. Once overcome opposition at home, through the elimination of hardliners like Molotov, Khrushchev could undertake his new path of peaceful coexistence with the West. Revolution and struggle against capitalism could also be obtained avoiding war and violence giving the Soviet Union the chance to grow without the constant fear of an attack from outside. After the death of Stalin, according to Khrushchev new vision of a "collective leadership", for

the first time power could be share within the party rather than be concentrated in the hand of only one person. This new concept was seen as extremely dangerous by Mao, whose aim inside the Chinese Communist Party was to hold absolute power and build an increasing personalized regime. Khrushchev wanted Mao to follow him in his new way of making foreign politics to reach together the common goal of building socialism but Mao was not willing to take a turn away from his ideal of revolution at home and abroad as main tool for foreign politics.

Moreover Mao was becoming more and more intolerant to Soviet advisors in China. In his view of personal infallibility, criticism about his own creation, the Great Leap Forward, was not acceptable and even when the first signs of disaster started to appear, Soviet suggestions about changing economic policies were scorned and ignored.

In October 1957 when the Soviet Union succeeded in launching two Soviet Sputniks and the first intercontinental ballistic missile, Mao sensed that the “eastern wind” was blowing stronger and overcoming the “western wind” and felt that history was on the side of Communism.

When the Chinese leader visited Moscow in November was eager to take advantage of Soviet technological progress, most of which was supplied to China as well, to depart from peaceful coexistence and adopt a much less accommodating approach toward the West. Khrushchev wanted stability, Mao revolution. Both of them were confident about their own different way to reach the same goal and unwilling to make any compromise toward the other. For Mao détente with Washington was not on the table as that meant giving up the chance of conquering Taiwan and finally unify all China. A void of common ground on how to face the Western world and the capitalist enemies contributed to make the Sino-Soviet alliance more and more fragile.

During his second visit to China, in July 1958, Khrushchev, pursuing his plan to get access to the seas and strengthen Soviet military

might on the oceans proposed to Mao a radio communications station on Chinese territory to support Soviet submarines and a joint Sino-Soviet submarine fleet. China contribution would have been the ports to give access to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Soviet Union would have provided the vessels.

Mao could not be convinced, pointing at the fact the China could build its own radio station if provided Soviet equipment and technology. Moreover China insisted on its right to command the Soviet vessels stationed in Chinese ports. In the same way a Soviet proposal for a shared anti-aircraft defence was refused. Mao thought that Khrushchev was trying to tighten Soviet control over Chinese domestic affairs and using the Chinese ally to increase Soviet leverage vis-à-vis the United States in the new scenario of peaceful coexistence.

Moscow was shocked at China refusal and labelled it as a striking expression of Chinese egoism. In the view of the Soviet leader Mao was only seeking to maintain his country sovereignty and independence and had no interest in chasing the dream of an international Communism.

Immediately after Khrushchev left China, Mao, in a move that looked like a slap in the face of the Soviet Union and a laugh at Soviet policy of détente, on August 23 started to shell Jinmen and Mazu islands, located between Taiwan and the Chinese province of Fujian. Mao wanted to show his iron will in confronting the imperialists and present himself as the unifier of China.

He sought to trigger an international crisis also to reinforce his support at home where, after the emerging disaster of the Great Leap Forward, his leadership and accuracy of political and economic choices started to be questioned.

The Chinese leadership later declared to the Soviets no fear or concern regarding the possibility of an atomic retaliation by the United States and the attack to Taiwan was a brazen manifestation of that approach. What was most irritating for Moscow was that Beijing acted unilaterally without even informing his ally about the intention of attacking Taiwan. No previous consultation on tactics, refusal to accept Soviet military support and the bizarre end of the crisis with

Mao stating that China will shell Jinmen and Mazu on alternate days. All together these actions clearly showed to Moscow Mao unreliability and presented him as an indomitable wild horse with whom agreeing a common foreign policy seemed more and more unfeasible.

Conflicting approaches to foreign policy could not have been more straightforward and from that point on the malaise between the two countries started to deteriorate with no chance of healing.

Khrushchev still was not ready to loose such a strategically important ally as China and after his trip to the United States where he met President Dwight D. Eisenhower in September 1959, decided to make a last attempt to bring Mao back to his side. The following month he flew to Beijing and tried to convince Mao of being patient on the Taiwan issues bringing the example of Lenin who himself suffered territories loss before managing to win them back later in his life. Mao was not impressed and rather took the meeting as a good occasion to reinforce his attacks against the Soviet leader and lecture him about the right way to carry on a revolution and pursue Marxism-Leninism.

Referring to his last trip to the United States as a surrender to the capitalist foes, Mao went on accusing Khrushchev of supporting India in the border clashes against China and stressed Moscow hesitation in sharing nuclear technology with its Asian ally. The Soviet delegation blamed the Chinese for their approach to the Tibetan question highlighting the fact that letting the Dalai Lama fleeing to India had been a serious mistake for which the Chinese should bear the burden. The border clash with India was also considered Chinese fault and for the Soviets China policy toward Taiwan did not make any sense.

Khrushchev could not see the meaning of shelling the offshore islands if the People Republic of China did not have a full intention of taking them.

*“As for the firing at the off-shore islands, if you shoot, then you ought to capture these islands, and if you do not consider necessary capturing these islands, then there is no use in*

*firing. I do not understand this policy of yours. Frankly speaking, I thought you would take the islands and was upset when I learned that you did not take them.”*<sup>41</sup>

Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi contributed to the conversation with direct accusations and insults in the face of the Soviet leader who could not avoid losing his temper.

*“Chen Yi: “Speaking of the effectiveness of efforts to pull Nehru to our side, our method will be more efficient, and yours is time-serving”*

*N.S. Khrushchev: “Chen Yi is Minister of Foreign Affairs and he can weigh his words. He did not say it at random. We have existed for 42 years, and for 30 years we existed alone [as a socialist country] and adjusted to nothing, but carried out our principled communist policy.”*

*Chen Yi: “The Chinese people evoked pity for a long time and during many decades lived under oppression of British, American, French and other imperialists. The Soviet comrades should understand this. We are now undertaking certain measures to resolve the conflict with India peacefully, and just one fact testifies to this, that perhaps Vice President of India Radhakrishnan will come to us in mid-October. We also have a certain element of time-serving. You should understand our policy correctly. Our line is firmer and more correct.”*

*N.S. Khrushchev: “Look at this lefty. Watch it, comrade Chen Yi, if you turn left, you may end up going to the right. The oak is also firm, but it breaks. I believe that we should leave this*

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<sup>41</sup> "Discussion between N.S. Khrushchev and Mao Zedong" October 02, 1959, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF), f. 52, op. 1, d. 499, ll. 1-33, copy in Volkogonov Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Translated for CWIHP by Vladislav M. Zubok. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112088>

*issue aside, for we have a different understanding of it.””* <sup>42</sup>

What made the dialogue even more difficult was the fact that previously Khrushchev had met with General Peng Dehuai, the Chinese Defence Minister, earlier that year and had a more constructive dialogue. Unfortunately for the Soviet leader, Peng Dehuai paid for his critique of the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan Conference, he was arrested and replaced by Lin Biao, a strong supporter of Mao's policies and ideology.

The meeting manifested a fracture in the Sino-Soviet relations that reached a point of no return and turned out to be the last time Mao Zedong and Nikita Khrushchev met.

By 1960 an “intellectual warfare” broke out in the main Chinese and Soviet journals with each side giving its own lesson on what was Marxism-Leninism and about orthodox ideology. The Chinese insisted with a vision of the revolution in which war was inevitable and this could meet no compromise with the Soviet idea of a peaceful coexistence. Geopolitical divergences deepened ideological disagreements which in turn undermined the alliance.

On top of this, Mao's aspiration to present himself as the world leader of Communism after the departure of Stalin could not pair with the Soviet reputation of founder and father of the movement.

In June 1960 at the congress of the Romanian Communist party the Chinese Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union openly clashed against each other and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July Khrushchev ordered the return home of the 1,400 Soviet advisors operating in Chinese territory. Most of them were back within three weeks. <sup>43</sup>

In 1963 Mao sent a delegation to Moscow with the implicit task of attacking the Soviets, the group of officials headed by Deng Xiaoping would be the last to be received from the Soviet Union for many

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China And The World Since 1750* (Basic Books, 2012), 280.



years to come.

On August 5 of the same year the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain met in Moscow to sign the nuclear test ban treaty. To Mao this was another blatant sign of Soviet plan to exclude China from the “nuclear powers club”. The Chairman expressed his opinion on the treaty the following year when on October 16, 1964, at Lop Nur in the South Eastern part of Xinjiang province, China detonated its first atomic weapon becoming the fifth nation in the world to possess nuclear capability.

Subsequently Mao began to lay claim to lands acquired by the Soviets dating back to the time of imperial Russia. Territories spanning from Central Asia, Siberia, Mongolia and Manchuria were once again considered by China as its own territory and such claims became another cause of enmity between the two countries.

In March 1969 territorial claims turned into border skirmishes and a limited Chinese military operation took place at Zhenbao/Damanskii island in the Ussuri River. The Soviets suffered some casualties.

In August another clash occurred on the border with Xinjiang in Western China. This time the death toll was much higher.

The relation between the two Communist allies was already in tatters since the beginning of the 1960s, but with this border war it reached the bottom.

As we will see, Pyongyang will be able to play the rivalry between China and USSR at its own advantage, succeeding in extorting military and economic aid from both of the countries for the entire duration of the Sino-Soviet rift.

## PYONGYANG SWINGING DIPLOMACY: BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN MOSCOW AND BEIJING

During the years in which the Sino-Soviet conflict was latent but yet not openly surfaced, North Korea could easily enjoy the benefits of being an ally of both without putting too much effort in diplomatic games to captivate the attentions of one or the other. The Soviet Union and China, not fully aware of the level of deterioration their

disagreements will take, at first did not force the Koreans to make a clear stand on only one side.

In 1958 relations with China were fairly stable. North Korean and Chinese media were emphasising the common struggle against the imperialists and often referred to the days of the Korean War as the glorious time of the defeat of the enemies of Marxism-Leninism under the united sacrifice of the Korean and Chinese army. Visits of high ranking members were often exchanged, economic and cultural cooperation was flourishing.

In parallel Pyongyang also kept in good terms with the Soviet Union stressing its role as leader of the international proletarian movement and showing gratitude for the economic and military help received.

*“Kim Il Sung spoke very sincerely about friendship with the Soviet Union, about the selfless aid of the Soviet Union to the DPRK, the great attention and concern of the CPSU: the CPSU CC leadership helps us daily and when necessary points out shortcomings in [our] work.”*<sup>44</sup>

*“In his speech Kim Il Sung spoke very warmly about the Soviet Army, the liberator of the Korean people from Japanese occupation, and cordially thanked the CPSU CC and Marshal of the Soviet Union Malinovsky for the opportunity afforded the DPRK military delegation to become familiar with the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union. He also spoke highly of the work of the Soviet military specialists to train KPA personnel and thanked them for the work they had done.*

*Kim Il Sung spoke with great satisfaction about the well-organized talks between the DPRK delegation and the Soviet delegation concerning the long-range plan for the economy and the reciprocal deliveries between the USSR and DPRK for 1959-1965, and expressed deep gratitude to the*

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<sup>44</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A. M. Puzanov for 18 May 1958" May 18, 1958, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 14, delo 6, p. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116024>

*Soviet government for granting all the requests of the DPRK.”*<sup>45</sup>

The Soviet Union had played a crucial role in the reconstruction of the industrial infrastructures of North Korea after Americans' bombing during the Korean War razed all the industries built during the Japanese occupation.

Among the industries restored under Soviet assistance were the Pyongyang textile mill, the Kim Chaek iron works, Supung hydroelectric power station, Heungnam fertilizer factory, Changjin steel foundry.

On March 17, 1959, the two countries signed an agreement according to which the Soviet Union would give technical assistance to North Korea for the construction of a thermo-power station with a generating capacity of 200,000 kilowatts, ammonium and chloride-vinyl factories, flax spinning and woolen textile mills, the total provided amounting to 500 million rubles to repay to Moscow through trade.<sup>46</sup>

North Korea was importing from the Soviet Union commodities like pipes, machines, chemical products, trucks and locomotives and exporting to its ally ores, cement, metals, fruit and silk fabrics.

Under another agreement signed on September 7, 1959, North Korea would start receiving technical assistance for the construction of an atomic reactor and a laboratory of nuclear physics as well as training of Korean personnel. Nuclear energy was meant to be used for peaceful reasons and did not envisage a further development of nuclear weapons.

Only three months earlier, in the mounting deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviet Union had cancelled the agreement, signed two year before, which would have provided China with a

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<sup>45</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A. M. Puzanov for 28 May 1958" May 28, 1958, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 14, delo 6, p. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116027>

<sup>46</sup> Chin O. Chung, *Pyongyang Between Peking And Moscow: North Korea's Involvement In The Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (University of Alabama Press, 1978), 38.

sample of an atomic bomb and technical guidance for its fabrication. Cultural cooperation was also prosperous with many Korean students sent to study in Soviet universities.

Nevertheless, despite the gargantuan aid flowing from Moscow into North Korea economy and defense, the new policy of peaceful coexistence introduced by Khrushchev during the twentieth and twenty-first Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union soon proved to be incompatible with North Korean interests. At the same time the Korean situation had much more in common with the Chinese one. North Korea supreme goal was the unification of the country under the leadership of Kim Il Sung and there was no space for any peaceful coexistence with the regime of Syngman Rhee in the South of the country. The United States had been the “evil force” that prevented the North Korean troops from a full takeover of the country in 1950 and still hindered any new attempt of reunification by Kim Il Sung by putting South Korea under the American nuclear umbrella and providing aid and assistance for the South Koreans to build up their own army. It was either United States’ defeat or sacrifice of Kim Il Sung dream, there was not a third road paved with peace or existence of two different countries on the Korean peninsula.

China had a similar view on its own “unification affair” regarding Taiwan, the missing piece to accomplish the unification of the country. Also in this situation it was due to American intervention that Mao’s plan had to be postponed indefinitely when in 1950, after the breakout of the Korean war, American President Harry S. Truman gave the order to station the US Seventh Fleet to Taiwan to prevent the Chinese communist forces to take advantage of the crisis in Korea and invade the island. Peaceful coexistence with the United States was not something feasible. The two Asian allies seemed to have a common agenda for a similar issue.

What China and North Korea also shared vis-à-vis Khrushchev new approach to Soviet Politics was their common opinion on de-Stalinization and, in particular, the aspect concerning the cult of personality.

Kim Il Sung had more personal reason to oppose de-Stalinization as

it had been the Marshal's choice to appoint him as leader of the emerging North Korean regime. Mao did not share the same gratitude for the Soviet leader but what they both inherited from the Stalinist model was a strong reliance on the cult of personality as a tool to indoctrinate the masses, mobilize the population, penetrate the society and tighten their control on it.

Right in those years, inside their respective countries, both Mao and Kim were building a tremendous propaganda apparatus working daily on the promotion of their godlike figures as national heroes, unifiers of the motherland, guardians of the people, affectionate leaders.

Condemning the cult of personality was like sabotaging their own plan of building revolution at home, renouncing to play the best card in their deck.

China's response to Khrushchev's new approach to Soviet Foreign policy will be a complete refusal and will bring to the Sino-Soviet rift. North Korea chose, or was rather forced to choose, a different behavior toward the Soviets. Kim Il Sung's regime was heavily dependent on foreign aid to sustain his fragile economy and build up his army vis-à-vis a possible invasion from the South and the United States. Rejecting the Soviets and leaning to the Chinese side was not a profitable option, at the same time abandon the Chinese comrades that had helped him during the Korean war and, by the way, were still providing consistent economic and military aid, was not even to take into account.

Kim Il Sung's recipe was a mixture of neutrality and swinging between the two sides without taking a definite stand and thus without the need to renounce to any of the two allies.

The Korean leader was skillful enough to play Sino-Soviet rivalry to his advantage and obtain aid from both sides uninterrupted until the end of the Cold War. He wisely tried to keep either side unaware of his agreements with the other, showing loyalty, or at best neutrality, plus a pinch of little criticism towards the Chinese when privately engaged in talks with the Soviets and stressing unbreakable friendship and Soviet revisionism when dealing with Mao and his comrades.

In the late 1950s China launched its Great Leap Forward for building a socialist economy and increase production, reforms included land distribution and the creation of the communes where the Chinese population was supposed to share the effort and work together for the fulfilment of a prosperous communist society. The Chinese showed great enthusiasm for the movement but the Soviets were quite sceptical on the real benefit that these reforms could have for the Chinese economy.

Kim Il Sung, in regard to the Chinese socialist experiment, seemed to be able to embrace at the same time passionate curiosity when discussing with Mao, and gloomy pessimism when reporting to the Soviets allies.

*“Today, Comrade Kim Il Sung told me that after he arrives in Beijing, he would like to meet with Chairman Mao [Zedong] and Chairman Liu [Shaoqi] to discuss [North] Korea’s economic development over the past year. He expressed that he fully supports the resolutions of the Eighth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, [as well as] China’s Great Leap Forward, the People’s Communes, our general [political] line, and our opposition to Peng Dehuai’s right opportunist anti-Party clique.”*<sup>47</sup>

*“During the return flight, c. Kim Il Sung explained to c. Puzanov that he categorically disagrees with many things in China, for instance with communes. During his visit in China, Chinese comrades showed him one commune. Of course, they chose one of the best. Mao Zedong then suggested setting up communes according to the Chinese example. C. Kim Il Sung ordered at that time in some place to introduce communal meals in a similar way but it did not work. While visiting that village, he gathered the elders and asked their*

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<sup>47</sup> "Report by Qiao Xiaoguang on a Conversation with Kim Il Sung" September 21, 1959, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Shanxi Provincial Archives, C54-1011-39. P76. Obtained for NKIDP by Shen Zhihua and translated for NKIDP by Jeffrey Wang. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115345>

*opinion. They told him the problem is that everybody eats three times as much regardless of accomplished work. Before, all ate in moderation. After this experience, the Korean comrades abandoned the idea of introducing communes and instead made steps at the beginning of the year to eliminate egalitarianism and to improve compensation for work in agriculture according to the amount and difficulty of work.”*<sup>48</sup>

North Korea's twofold approach can be noticed also in its approach to some of the crisis that involved China and consequently the Soviet Union itself: the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958 and the Sino-India border clashes of 1959.

The Taiwan Strait Crisis began with the shelling of Jinmen and Mazu islands on August 23 and it was one of the main reasons of friction between China and the Soviet Union. China's shelling of the islands was a clear slap in the face of Khrushchev policy of peaceful coexistence.

In a conversation between Zhou Enlai, Kim Il Sung and other members of the respective communist parties the Koreans clearly expressed their backing to the Chinese action:

*“Premier Zhou Enlai: Do you, the Korea Workers' Party, have any opinion on our way of dealing with the Taiwan issue? Can you understand [our methods]?”*

*Kim Il Sung: We fully support China's methods.*

*Pak Jeong-ae: Fully support.”*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Record of Conversation between the Czech Ambassador in the DPRK with the Soviet Ambassador" July 26, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, State Central Archive, Prague, File A. Novotny, foreign affairs, KPDR, Translated by Adolf Kotlik. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113700>

<sup>49</sup> "Minutes of Conversation between Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and North Korean Prime Minister Kim Il Sung" November 27, 1958, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA Document 204-00064-02 (1). Obtained for NKIDP by Gregg Brazinsky and translated for NKIDP by Mengyin Kung. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113694>

At the same time in a report of a conversation of August 1960 between Soviet ambassador to the DPRK and comrade Pak Geum-cheul we can read:

*“The policy of peaceful coexistence so clearly formulated at the 20th and 21st CPSU congresses was supported by our Party. Both previously and now our comrades support it even more, recognizing that the policy of peaceful coexistence is an inherent problem of modern times. We think that the pursuit of a policy of peaceful coexistence and the preservation of peace is the main policy of the international Communist and worker's movement.”*<sup>50</sup>

After the People Liberation Army entered Lhasa, capital of Tibet, in 1950, considering the strategic importance of the region and the particular cultural situation of the area given by the fact that the population was ethnically Tibetan and not Han, like the majority of the inhabitants of China, Mao Zedong opted for a more cautious approach in carrying out land reform in that province. The Communists condemned the “feudalistic oppression” exerted by the Dalai Lama and the Buddhist elite on the peasants but they chose not to dismantle the old, traditional system and bring in socialism gradually. However when land reforms began in neighbouring Sichuan province and Tibetan communities living in the area started to show signs of dissatisfaction, protests against the government broke out and spread up to Lhasa forcing the Chinese army to tighten security and reinforce its presence in Tibet.

In spring 1959 rumours of a plan by the Chinese army to kidnap the Dalai Lama spread around Lhasa and brought thousands of people on the streets to protest against the Chinese government, protests soon become riots and on March the 20<sup>th</sup> the People's Liberation Army started to crush the rebellion.

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<sup>50</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 13 August 1960" August 13, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 7, p.43-71. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119444>



The Dalai Lama, spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people, fled the capital and on March 31 crossed the border with India to take refuge in the neighbouring country. By the end of May 7,000 Tibetan refugees had followed him to seek asylum in India contributing to sour the Sino-India relations.

On 25 August, 1959, clashes occurred at Longju, on the eastern side of the Sino-Indian border, between the garrisons of the two countries. The death of an Indian soldier triggered mutual accusations with each side accusing the other of being responsible of violating territorial sovereignty and of having fired the first shot.<sup>51</sup>

On September 12, 1959, KCNA, Korean Central News Agency, the state news agency of North Korea and direct expression of the Workers' Party, stated North Korea full support for China in the Sino-India border clash.

Nevertheless documents from the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang dating August 1960 show us a quite different approach by the Nord Korans in regard to the border issue.

*“We agree with the Soviet comrades that the Chinese comrades have aggravated the border conflict with India, have turned Nehru into a hero, and have put the Communist Party of India in a difficult position. The Soviet comrades correctly say that previously even kings did not fight because of border issues, but now the Chinese comrades are fighting with India because of a border issue. We also completely agree with the Soviet comrades on this issue.”*<sup>52</sup>

Other than the double-headed approach that Kim Il Sung adopted in order to play up both China and the Soviet Union, the Korean leader had also another strategy to avoid taking side in the Sino-Soviet rift

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<sup>51</sup> Chen Jian, The Tibetan Rebellion Of 1959 And China's Changing Relations With India And The Soviet Union, Journal Of Cold War Studies, Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 54-101, Harvard University.

<sup>52</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 13 August 1960" August 13, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 7, p.43-71. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119444>

and that was neutrality and self-reliance.

At the Bucharest Conference of June 1960 in the whirlwind of attacks and accusations flying between the Chinese and Soviet delegation all East European Communist parties sided with the Soviet Union and only Albania threw its weight behind China. North Korea, as well as North Vietnam, had a neutral stance and carefully tried to avoid any expression that could show any explicit favouritism towards either side. The Moscow Conference of Communist Parties of November-December of the same year showed a similar approach by the North Korean side which tried to balance sympathies and criticism, avoiding calling by name the two factions during its speech. Kim Il Sung emphasis on self-reliance had its foundation in a speech made on December 1955 and which can be considered the proclamation of Juche ideology. Juche is the idea that expresses North Korea's quest for cultural, political, economic autonomy and can be considered the demonstration of Kim Il Sung attempt of reaching greater political independence and getting rid of foreign influence in the internal affairs of his country. The speech which was also aimed at attacking and denouncing the pro-Soviet faction within the Korean Workers' Party emphasized the need for a more free-standing attitude in every aspect of Korean life and society. Making references to Korean uniqueness through culture, history, geography, art, Kim urged his comrades to look for the future of the North Korean society in its own cultural heritage and in its past of struggle for independence from the Japanese.

Juche has elements of nationalism, autarchy, isolationism and it will become the touchstone of North Korea ideology for the years to come in a continuous search for self-reliance.

In the tumultuous time of the Sino-Soviet conflict Juche proved very useful when trying to avoid any serious commitment in favour or against any side in the rivalry between North Korea's two allies.

In parallel to North Korea effort to maintain profitable ties with both China and the Soviet Union, the two communist giants, fearing to lose the strategically important alliance with North Korea and unwilling to take the risk of having Kim Il Sung leaning to the side of

the rival, started to lobby the North Koreans to pull them on their respective sphere of influence.

On October 13, 1960, the Soviet exempted North Korea from repaying past loans for an amount of 760 million rubles and deferred the payment of other 140 million rubles. Under other agreements stipulated in those years the two countries enhanced scientific and technical cooperation and the Soviet committed to helped with the construction of two thermoelectric plants in Pukchang and Pyongyang, an oil refinery, for which they would also provide the crude oil needed for its use, and light industrial plants for the production of textiles. Soviet Union was also to provide aid to expand the Kim Chaek iron works to an annual production capacity of 2.8 million tons of steel and 2.3 million tons of rolled structural steel. In term of trade, in 1963 Moscow provided North Korea with goods for an amount of 85 million rubles.

The Chinese, on their part, granted a long term loan to the North Korean regime amounting to 420 million rubles and contributed in the construction of factories for the production of rubber tires, radio communication instruments chemicals and consumer goods.<sup>53</sup>

Along with economic aid the Chinese tried to win Kim Il Sung loyalty also by diplomatic means with the persistent request of taking their side against the Soviets:

*“The Chinese comrades exerted pressure in order to bring the KWP to their side in the debate between the CPSU and CCP last year. The invitation of Comrade Kim Il Sung to China last year (before his incognito visit to Moscow) also proves this . . . Last October, on the occasion of the 10th year anniversary of the Chinese volunteers entering the war, a Chinese delegation headed by General He Long [vice-premier of the State Council] visited Korea and tried again to win Korea over to the Chinese side. Despite this, the Korean delegation did not support China at the November conference, although,*

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<sup>53</sup> Chin O. Chung, *Pyongyang Between Peking And Moscow: North Korea's Involvement In The Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (University of Alabama Press, 1978), 55-56.

*together with other delegations, [they] sought to find a compromise solution. To sum up, the Chinese did not reach their goal, despite a further credit of 420 million rubles offered to the DPRK last autumn.”*<sup>54</sup>

Kim Il Sung diplomatic mastery reached its top in summer 1961, when within the timespan of six days managed to conclude and sign two treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with both China and the Soviet Union. On July 6 Kim concluded the first treaty in Moscow and on its way back stopped in Beijing when on, July 11, signed his name next to the one of Zhou Enlai, the signatory for the People Republic of China.

It appears to be quite obvious that the Korean leader did not inform China and the Soviet Union of his intentions to sign a treaty with both of them. Knowing that, by the reason of the conflict running deeper between them, they would have not agreed to sign knowing the other part was also going to, but they rather would have forced him to make a choice between the two. The Korean leader wisely decided to keep both sides in the dark without let them know his manoeuvres. Kim, killed two birds with a stone, was then back in Pyongyang reassured to have the two most powerful communist countries in the world both on his side.

The two treaties were very similar especially in their objects and purpose.

They both underlined mutual defence and in case of one of the two parties being the object of an armed attack, it was expected the other signatory to render military assistance by all means at its disposal.

They also promoted economic and cultural cooperation to be pursued in full respect of the state sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

To ensure North Korea would remain neutral and would not side with any of the two rivals within the Sino-Soviet dispute, both treaties stated that each of the signatory parties shall not conclude any

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<sup>54</sup> "Chinese Policy toward the DPRK and Behavior of the Chinese Ambassador in Pyongyang" March 16, 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j-Korea-5/bc-0030/1961 5.d. Translated by József Litkei. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113388>

alliance or take part in any coalition or action directed against the other member of the treaty.

Few minor differences distinguished the two treaties. In the treaty signed with the Soviet Union the preamble highlighted the principles of the United Nations as guides to follow in preserving and enhancing stability, peace and security in the world and Eastern Asia. For obvious reason, the treaty stipulated with the Chinese did not contain any reference to the United Nations, not being the People Republic of China a member of the organization. The People Republic will become a member and will take its seat in the Security Council among the permanent members only in 1971 when it will replace the Republic of China (Taiwan).

In addition, the treaty signed with the Soviets was to be effective for ten years and renewable for other five years if one year before the expiring date none of the signatory parties would express any will to withdraw.

The treaty signed in Beijing did not specify any termination period and would remain effective until both parties would agree its revision or cancellation.

Finally, probably under pressure of the Soviet Union and China respectively, in the Moscow treaty Kim stressed the importance and confirmed his adhesion to the principle of peaceful coexistence while in the Beijing treaty there was space for an attack to modern revisionism and he expressed his backing for China in regard to the Taiwan issue.<sup>55</sup>

Despite Kim Il Sung claim for neutrality and his attempt to stand in the middle between China and the Soviet Union his feelings toward the two communist superpowers were in fact quite different and already from the beginning of the 1960s a preference towards China started to emerge.

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<sup>55</sup> 苏朝友好合作互助条约 (Suchao Youhao Hezuo Huzhu Tiaoyue) 1961年7月6日, Soviet-North Korean Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Cooperation, July 6, 1961, (Chinese version).  
中朝友好合作互助条约 (Zhongchao Youhao Hezuo Huzhu Tiaoyue) 1961年7月11日, Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Cooperation, July 11, 1961, (Chinese version).

First of all we need to consider on what the two relations were based on.

Soviet-North Korean relations were based on a shared vision, at least in the first decade after the end of the Second World War, of common struggle under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, Stalin support of Kim Il Sung in the power struggle occurred during the formation of the North Korean state and Korean gratitude for the Soviet contribution in the liberation of the peninsula from the Japanese occupiers. This is what, in terms of ideology, Kim valued in his alliance with the Soviets. The rest of the foundations of the Soviet-North Korean alliance were all about economic and military aid flowing almost constantly from Moscow to Pyongyang.

On the other side the relation built with China, even if also characterized by consistent economic support, lied on the much more solid pillar of the Korean War fought side by side against the common enemy of the American imperialists.

The fact that China had decided to deploy its troops and sacrifice its soldiers to assist the Korean brothers had been like a common, unifying, holy baptism of a new born brotherhood intended to last for many years to come and survive through the stormy changes of history. The importance of the days spent fighting together during the war is noticeable in the frequent references made in many statements by leaders and political figures of both countries.

The conflict in Korea provided China and North Korea with a solid base of mutual trust and support to sustain a future, prolific coexistence in the scenario of world politics and international relations.

In addition to the time spent together on the battlefield, North Korea also shared with China a more similar approach to international politics. Especially after Stalin death, despite paraded sympathy for Khrushchev new policy of peaceful coexistence, Kim Il Sung found the new Soviet overture to the West not fully compatible with his own goal of reunification of the Korean peninsula. Kim approach was one of more militant nature, closer indeed to Mao Zedong idea of continuous revolution and anti-imperialist struggle.

Regarding the Soviets, on October 1960 Khrushchev was expected

to visit Pyongyang as announced early in August. It was meant to be the first time that the leader of the Soviet Union would visit North Korea.

In the Korean capital there was great expectation and trepidation and knowing Kim Il Sung appeal for colossal parades, the entire city was mobilized in preparation for the Soviet leader arrival. On October 11, Khrushchev announced that he had to cancel the trip stating that his current visit to the United States, where he met President Eisenhower at Camp David, took longer than expected.

There is little doubt that this episode did not please the Korean leadership who must have felt being stood up right at the time of the meeting of highest symbolic importance.

Moscow subsequent cancellation of 190 million dollars from North Korean debts was probably not enough to heal Kim Il Sung wounded pride. Face in Chinese and Korean culture is something often treasured as even more important than material benefit, causing a Korean or Chinese leader losing face is one of the worst slight someone could do.

Not enough, in two years, the unfolding of the Cuban crisis will show to North Korea how the Soviet Union could show enthusiasm and full support for a small country like Cuba and then leave it for the sake of Soviet national interests in a timespan of merely two years.

No wonder that in the eyes of Kim Il Sung China was a much more trustworthy and reliable ally than the Soviet Union and a deeper affinity, given also by the common cultural background of the Asian countries, played a key role in shaping Kim Il Sung greater sympathy towards the Chinese rather than the Soviets.

In the light of these considerations we can understand the reasons behind Sino-North Korean relations' take off from the beginning of the 1960s.

Already in 1961 relations between China and North Korea solidified in the treaty of mutual cooperation and friendship. This was just a taste of the positive trend that will mark out the ties between the two countries in the first half of 1960s.

In 1962 the situation for Mao inside China did not look bright and

optimistic.

The disastrous results of the Great Leap Forward started to fully emerge and voices of criticism, even if feeble, had already surfaced within the party.

Facing a tense situation at home and with India sending troops to patrol disputed border areas, Mao Zedong thought a confrontation with Nehru would have been inevitable.

On October 20, 1962, Chinese troops attacked on two fronts, on the East of Bhutan and on the West, near the Pakistani border, South of the Kunlun mountains.

Indian forces were routed and after one month, when the Chinese declared a ceasefire, all what used to be disputed territory before the attack was now under the control of the People Republic of China.<sup>56</sup>

Knowing the enthusiasm and friendliness pervading Sino-North Korean relations in those years it is not surprising that in the Sino-Indian war Kim Il Sung gave his full support to the Chinese ally.

*“Concerning the Chinese-Indian border conflict the DPRK completely sides with the PR China. The DPRK press is covering this issue broadly. Statements and notes by the PRC government get published, as well as important articles from the Chinese press about the border issue. On 31 October, for instance, the KWP central newspaper had an extra page featuring the full text of an article from Beijing's People's Paper [Renmin Ribao] titled “Discussing the Chinese-Indian Border Issue and Revisiting Again the Philosophy of Nehru”.*

*DPRK statements clearly express support for the actions of the PR China. The Acting Ambassador of the DPRK to the GDR, Hong Deng U [sic], responded this way to a question before students of the German Academy for State and Law “Walter Ulbricht”: “The DPRK is viewing the Chinese-Indian border conflict as an expression of class struggle between socialism and capitalism. The PR China is a socialist country*

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<sup>56</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China And The World Since 1750* (Basic Books, 2012), 284.



*and gets supported by the DPRK. The DPRK condemns the Indian aggression. We think that U.S. imperialism attempts to sow discord among the peoples. This is why all socialist countries have to support the PR China.”*<sup>57</sup>

Almost at the same time of the Sino-Indian border war, on the other side of the world between the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea the Cuban missile crisis was unfolding.

China took the chance given the crisis to further criticize the onetime ally and new found enemy of the Soviet Union, accusing the communist country of the umpteenth capitulation to the United States. The Chinese regime found despicable the way the Soviets used the Cuban regime to pursue their own national interests and then abandoned it in what was perceived by Mao and his comrades as little short of a withdrawal.

The Caribbean crisis showed again Pyongyang alignment and harmony with Chinese foreign policy when concerning confrontation with the imperialist countries and highlighted one more time that North Korea's stance was in compliance with the Chinese one.

The North Korean regime through its official newspaper, the Rodong Sinmun, expressed its indignation for the way the crisis had been handled by the Soviets.

*“Concerning its positions on the crisis in the Caribbean, the KWP frequently stated its displeasure with the measures to secure peace in the Caribbean sea by making omissions [in public statements]. Here as well the Soviet Union is accused of retreat and unprincipled compromises. “How can they [the modern revisionists] say the following: Since there was no outbreak of global war during the 'Caribbean Crisis', this constitutes a 'merit' of Kennedy's and a couple of other 'rational people's' 'levelheadedness'? Such are nothing else*

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<sup>57</sup> "Information on the DPRK Position Regarding Measures by the Soviet Government for a Peaceful Resolution of the Cuba Conflict and Regarding the Chinese-Indian Border Conflict" November 16, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110515>

*than dumb maneuvers by those who retreat from the nuclear threats of U.S. imperialism and make unprincipled concessions and compromises. Now they just want to justify their shameful position.” (“Rodong Sinmun”, 22 October 1963).”*<sup>58</sup>

In 1963 the two East Asian allies sat on a table to negotiate border issues. The Chinese delegation appeared to be particularly generous and magnanimous towards the Korean counterpart and willing to grant territorial concessions in a way normally extraneous to this kind of diplomatic negotiations.

The Chinese “largesse” can be viewed in the frame of the Sino-Soviet competition that in those years was worsening and that saw the two countries competing over influence on North Korea and trying to pull Kim Il Sung on the respective side. It can easily be considered an attempt by China to win Kim Il Sung loyalty but another reason for Chinese accommodating attitude was certainly that element of friendship and brotherhood that was the hallmark of the relations between the two countries.

Three-fifths of the Tianchi lake went to North Korea, the remaining two to China. For issues concerning the Yalu and Tumen rivers, which run along most of the Sino-Korean border, the two parts discarded the option of following the habitual procedure adopted internationally of dividing the river in two halves paralleled to a hypothetical middle line and assign each half to the respective country. Instead they chose an approach of communal exploit of the river, thus use, ownership, management and control of the Yalu and Tumen were jointly regulated by the two countries.

Regarding the numerous islands that dot the two rivers, they were divided according to the predominant ethnicity of the population residing on them.

In this way around four-fifths of the islands passed under North Korean jurisdiction. The island of Pidan on the mouth of the Yalu river

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<sup>58</sup> "Positions of the Korean Workers Party Leadership on the Basic Issues of our Epoch" December 02, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA, Berlin, DY 30, IV A2/20/251. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110124>

was regarded by the North Koreans as their property even though they communicate their intention of giving it to the Chinese as a sign of gratitude for the support received from China during the Korean War and to commemorate the sacrifice of the Chinese soldiers that died during the conflict. In reality China already regarded the island as part of its own territory, nevertheless after North Korea insisted on the ownership, the Chinese agreed and relocated around 50 Chinese households living on the island to the Chinese mainland. Thanks to Chinese concessions, 90 percent of the jurisdiction of the access to the Yalu river passed under North Korean control but left to Chinese vessels the right of free navigation.

Moreover some sections of territory on the Chinese side of the Yalu river were also given to North Korea after Chinese engineers set off dynamite to make an artificial waterway around that portion of land. Concessions to North Korea were so considerable that local Chinese officials in charge of the administration of the neighbouring provinces of Jilin and Liaoning made a complaint to the central government.<sup>59</sup>

On August 5, 1963, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States signed, in Moscow, the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. This prompted a furious reaction by the Chinese who saw the treaty as another sign of Soviet unwillingness to share with them nuclear technology and another surrender to the capitalist countries. Pyongyang backed the Chinese and sided with the non-signatory countries, supported the Asian ally in its counterproposal for a total nuclear disarmament and shared with them the same strong criticism towards the treaty itself and towards Moscow openness to engage in talks and negotiations with the United States.

*“On the question of war and peace the KWP leadership has adopted a non-Marxist and adventurist position. It is rejecting any negotiations conducted with the imperialists in the interest of securing the peace, and likewise the results (guarantee declaration for Cuba, Moscow Treaty) and compromises*

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<sup>59</sup> For a detailed account of the negotiations see: Chae-jin Lee, *China And Korea: Dynamic Relations* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1996), 99-100.

*achieved by those negotiations. The Korean comrades hold opinions according to which negotiations with imperialists only increase the latter's aggressiveness and the danger of war, encourage them to criminal actions, and overall represent a rejection of Marxism-Leninism.*

*The rejectionist KWP position is reflected in the DPRK not becoming a signatory of the Moscow Treaty and in corresponding articles published [in the Korean press]. The Soviet Union and Comrade Khrushchev are accused to have surrendered to the imperialists . . . The main groundswell of Korean publications is: "this treaty only serves U.S. imperialism's policies of aggression and war" ("Rodong Sinmun", 11 October 1963).*

*"In fact, the Moscow Treaty has offered convenient paths to the U.S. imperialists to assume superiority in the field of nuclear weapons and to produce ever more of them, thus increasing the danger of nuclear war even more." ("Rodong Sinmun", 4 August 1963)."<sup>60</sup>*

Despite stronger affinity with China, North Korea at the beginning of the 1960s was still heavily dependent on Soviet Union's economic and military aid and financial support from Moscow was something fundamental for Kim Il Sung's regime. At the same time Kim did not want that his ties with the Soviets influenced his warm and cordial relations with the Chinese and to avoid Mao's complaints about any sign of friendship with Moscow, Kim during the time of the Sino-Soviet rift always tried to operate in the shadows without letting know Beijing of his dealings with the Soviets. A striking example of this strategy is North Korean attempt to hide Moscow military supplies from the Chinese for reasons that at that time resulted unclear even to the Soviets themselves.

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<sup>60</sup> "Positions of the Korean Workers Party Leadership on the Basic Issues of our Epoch" December 02, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA, Berlin, DY 30, IV A2/20/251. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110124>

*“Acting Military Attaché of the Embassy Colonel Ustinov reported that the second detachment of the airplanes we have presented to the DPRK have successfully landed on the airfield near the Chinese border. One fact deserves attention – a fact that the Korean military does not hide from us. They do not want the Chinese to see or to know that Soviet pilots landed planes on this airfield. Therefore all measures were adopted in order to quickly take the Soviet pilots away from the airfield and organize their rest in a different place. [...] Here, in Korea, everything is done in order that [the existence of the Soviet] planes and submarines be unknown to the Chinese friends. We have still not ascertained the reasons for this phenomenon.”*<sup>61</sup>

The first half of the 1960s had been characterized by Pyongyang’s striving to maintain its alliance with both the Soviet Union and the People Republic of China despite the great acrimony between the two communist giants within the rising tension of the Sino-Soviet rift. Pyongyang was dependant on Soviet economic and military aid to sustain its regime and build up its army, at the same time, in term of ideology and political and cultural affinity Kim Il Sung was much closer to China and Mao Zedong than to the Soviet Union and its new leader Nikita Khrushchev.

The North Korean leader managed successfully to extract aid and support from both of the regimes without compromising his alliance with the two communist countries. He did that dealing with them bilaterally, most of the time without letting know any of the parts about his agreements with the other and when in need stressing North Korean neutrality and self-reliance based on the principle of Juche that he himself created and promoted as the hallmark of North Korea and North Korean society.

Kim Il Sung skilfully played the rivalry between China and the Soviet

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<sup>61</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Acting Soviet Military Attaché Ustinov" September 01, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, list 48. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110487>

Union to his own benefits. The Soviets and the Chinese, fearing that the precious and strategic ally would side with the enemy, showed no restraint in their willing to provide economic, military and diplomatic aid when this was perceived as a way to pull the North Korean leader back in their respective spheres of influence.

In this swing back and forth between the Chinese and the Soviets, North Korea always showed deeper affinity and compatibility with the Chinese ally and with Chinese approach to international politics. Ties with the Soviet Union were more of a “materialistic” kind, being Pyongyang continuously forced to rely on Soviet aid in order to keep its sinking economy afloat.

Sino-North Korean relations had been very warm and friendly during the first half of the 1960s but, as we will see, will face a bitter and unexpected turn in the second half of 1960s when Chinese domestic policy will move drastically to the left.

The rising of the Cultural Revolution in China will cause distrust and enmity between the two Asian allies and it will bring great difficulties to Kim Il Sung who will have very hard time in dealing with the new dogmatic and ultra-leftist ideas of Mao Zedong.

In Pyongyang by the mid 1960s Kim Il Sung was busy patching his torn economy and building up his army in the face of a possible aggression by the new military regime of Park Chung Hee in South Korea, meanwhile in the People Republic of China the stage was well set to perform the last and most intense drama ideated by Chairman Mao: “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”.

## **4. FACING HARD TIMES: THE YEARS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, 1965-1970**

In the long history of “friendship sealed in blood”, positive cooperation and mutual assistance have not always been uninterrupted and continuous but there have been times of shadows in which the ties between China and North Korea have been tarnished by reciprocal critique and distrust.

The heights of the frictions between the two countries took place during the tumultuous years of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

Facing a deepening clash with the Soviet Union on the international scene Mao began to become more and more paranoid about domestic issues as well and started to sense at every corner challenges and critiques to his political choices and to his own leadership.

As early as 1959 objections lifted by Defence Minister and wartime hero General Peng Dehuai about the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) lead to Mao decision to purge him. As Mao gloom deepened, wider purges will touch those party members who dared to question the GLF. Accused of being “right opportunists” and of conspiring against the Chairman as members of an anti-Party clique, they will be the first targets of Mao party’s cleansing.<sup>62</sup>

In the Soviet Union, on October 14, 1964, as result of rising criticism after the Cuban Crisis and previous economic policies, Soviet Communist Party Secretary General Nikita Khrushchev was dismissed. This sounded as an alarm for Mao who could envisage the same destiny for himself. Increasingly worried about his own leverage inside the party Mao become more and more convinced that a new revolution needed to be launched in order to re-establish the right path to class struggle and to give a new and unquestionable

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<sup>62</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.

authority to Ma Zedong Thought.

What followed, as we all know, is one of the darkest periods in Chinese history. The chaos and madness that erupted from the late 1960s and that stormed the country in all its geographical extension and social depth is something unique in world history. The Cultural Revolution, far from having repercussion only in the domestic front, did much to trouble China foreign relations with much of its allies and with North Korea as well.

## RISE AND FALL OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Mao's fear of a coup and distrust to many of his comrades, even those that have been with him since the Long March, is a crucial point that need to be consider when we want to look at the scenario before and during the Cultural Revolution.

The extent of power that Mao could wield inside the Chinese Communist Party and towards the Chinese population was so undisputable that has been noticed that by that time he had acquired the prerogatives of an emperor.<sup>63</sup> He could destroy the Party that he himself had created and replace many of its original members with his own followers. It has been estimated that around 60 percent of party members was purged.<sup>64</sup>

Among the new trustworthy disciples that the Chairman chose was Lin Biao, one of the military leaders that played a decisive role in the final victory of the Chinese Civil War.

Jiang Qing, after chasing fame and success as an actress in Shanghai, escaped to Yan'an where she managed to captivate Mao attention. Mao at that time was married with He Zizhen whom already gave him five children. Nevertheless the two divorced and Jiang Qing became Mao's new wife in 1938 but as a compromise with the other party leaders she was required to not get involved in politics for thirty years. As we will see, she will be back in the 60s

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<sup>63</sup> John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Belknap Press, Second Enlarged Edition, 2006), 384.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.



more militant than ever.

Jiang Qing and Lin Biao associated with some radicals intellectuals in Shanghai from where they launched their attack against the old party establishment in Beijing. In the army Luo Ruiqing, officer of the People Liberation Army was dismissed in April 1966, being guilty of disagreeing with Lin Biao point of view. Among intellectuals, Wu Han, professor of history at Tsinghua University, China leading historian of the Ming dynasty and vice-mayor of Beijing, became target of ferocious attacks. Peng Zhen, mayor of Beijing and top party official of the capital was removed from power during the spring of 1966.<sup>65</sup>

Most of the officials and intellectuals purged were accused of revisionism and turning to the “capitalist side”. These attacks intensified during what we can be considered the first phase of the Cultural Revolution known as the Fifty Days and lasting from June to August 1966.<sup>66</sup> During this first phase students from elementary schools to university were mobilized to criticize and denounce schools’ authorities and universities’ professors. During this time Mao was absent from Beijing and, being moving around central China, most of the time his location would be unknown even to top party members. He left to his deputy, Liu Shaoqi the organization and the handling of the situation in Beijing. Trying to control and keep calm the situation in the universities, Liu tried to contain the mass organization dispatching work teams to the main campuses to inquire about the situation in the universities and to prevent the students to act outside the supervision of the party. This decision of trying to control and mitigate the actions of the students will be later the main proof brought against Liu to demonstrate his “revisionist tendencies”.

During the second phase of the Cultural Revolution, from August 1966 to January 1967, it was time for Mao to be back on the podium. On his way back to the capital, to show anyone who had doubt about

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<sup>65</sup> For a detailed account about the dismissal from power of the main political entourage in Beijing see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> A division of the Cultural Revolution in four phases has been proposed in John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Belknap Press, Second Enlarged Edition, 2006).

his state of health, on July 16, 1966, the seventy-two-year-old Chairman together with other 5,000 participants took part in Wuhan's eleventh annual cross-Yangtze swimming competition covering a distance of around sixteen kilometres in an hour and five minutes. In triumph he was ready to be back in Beijing two days later to mobilize the masses for the struggle against "revisionism". During the Eleventh Plenum held in August 1966 Mao started his renovation of the party. Implicitly referring to Liu Xiaqi as the one being guilty for the dispatch of the work teams to control the students, he read to the participants:

*"What we have here is suppression and terror, and this terror originates with the [party] centre . . . Judging from the present suppression of the great Cultural Revolutionary activities of the students, I do not believe there is any real democracy or real Marxism. What we have here is standing on the side of the bourgeoisie to oppose the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Because the center not only has not supported the movement of the young students, but in fact has suppressed the student movement, I am of the view that something has to be done."* <sup>67</sup>

From this first speech it already starts to emerge that blind support that Mao will bestow on the masses that he mobilized and that will later become the Red Guards.

The plenum is a decisive turning point in the evolution of the Cultural Revolution and in the accomplishment of Mao cleansing of the party. Liu Xiaqi, number two of the party was demoted number eight in term of importance, the first step that will conclude in his total expulsion from the political scene.

The position of Liu was taken by Lin Biao, now the only vice chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and according to the party nomenklatura, (to use the Soviet terminology), future successor and heir of Mao as leader of the People Republic.

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<sup>67</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 89.

Furthermore what came out of the plenum was a document called “Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”, also known as the Sixteen Points.

The document was meant to be public property, broadcasted nationwide on radio on August 8 and published on the party newspaper, the People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), on August 9.

The Sixteen Points document meant to be the guideline of the new movement, one of the sources from which the masses had to take inspiration in order to carry out the struggle against revisionism and rectify whoever lost the right path of Marxism-Leninism and turned the capitalist road.

*“Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds and endeavor to stage a come-back. The proletariat must . . . change the mental outlook of the whole of society. At present, our objective is to struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic “authorities” and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic.”*<sup>68</sup>

This cloudy outline of objectives and methods of the new movement said everything and nothing at the same time. Who were meant to be those in authority taking the capitalist road, the reactionary bourgeoisie and the other exploiting classes was not clear to anyone. Mao's design of this so called new revolution was still far from being understood and left all the strata of Chinese society with everything but the choice of whether or not taking part in it. No one was exempted from this class struggle and everyone would have to be

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<sup>68</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 92-93.

required to show his loyalty to Mao Zedong Thought.

Everything could mean class struggle and fight against revisionism, from beating the intellectuals to destroy cultural heritage sites, from punish party cadres' relatives to loot so called bourgeois houses, from denouncing previous friends to getting rid of everything that seemed to be foreign.

No one, from Tibet to Manchuria, from Xinjiang to Yunnan, would be spared from the storm that was about to sweep the People Republic of China.

The most destructive weapon of the Cultural Revolution constituted of squads of young people, most of the time simply teenagers who, under the banner and the slogans of the new movement and equipped with Mao Red Book and wearing red armbands, were storming around the cities chasing down supposed revisionists, capitalists and whoever could be accused of having a bourgeois background. These militant and zealous youth were known as the Red Guards (*hongweibing*). The movement rose in mid-1966 and was abolished in mid-1968.

Boys and girls aging between nine and eighteen, the Red Guards were mainly students of elementary, middle and high schools, sometimes university students as well. They were mobilized during six massive rallies held in Beijing between August 18 and November 26, 1966. These rallies, organized by the People Liberation Army and the Cultural Revolution Group, saw the participation of millions of young volunteers coming from all over China. To facilitate their movements railway transportation fees were waived, universities and schools were arranged to provide free accommodation and even ordinary citizens were suggested to share their private homes with the newly arrived. Classes were suspended as well as universities' lessons.

The zealotry of the Red Guards in promoting the Cultural Revolution soon turned to destructive actions again property and people. Hunting down what was referred to as the "Four Olds": old idea, old culture, old customs, old habits, the young students turned everyday life in a reign of terror. Destroying books, houses, temples, cultural

monuments, beating and humiliating people publicly, became something of a routine activity of the Red Guards. Favourite targets were intellectuals, the better-off, officials and, in an increasingly xenophobic environment, every foreigner or everyone that had been in contact or had been dealing with foreigners and the foreign environment.

Not even former chief of state Liu Xiaohu and the secretary-general of the party Deng Xiaoping escaped the accusations. Just because they were at the top of the old party hierarchy, that same hierarchy that in Mao's vision needed to be demolished first to be rebuilt once again from the ashes, in the eyes of young fanatics they looked like the most wicked and deceitful traitors.

Liu Xiaohu was tortured and died in prison, revolution hero Peng Dehuai was beaten until his back broke.<sup>69</sup>

In 1968 Deng Pufang, one of Deng Xiaoping's five children, under continuous harassment from the Red Guards fell off, (or was thrown out), the window of a high floor of a building and broke his spine. He was paralyzed and had to spend the rest of his life on a wheelchair.<sup>70</sup>

What contributed to an even higher level of tension and chaos was the factionalism between different groups of Red Guards that sometimes would break out in warfare-like situations.

This factionalism is rooted in the educational system of the 1960s that saw two main kinds of students rivaling for entrance to university after high school. The first kind were the children of intellectuals' families that due to the educational background of the parents had much more possibilities to reach elevated academic standards, at the same time just because they belonged to a better-off and better educated society, their class pedigree was considered of lower status from the point of view of revolutionary hierarchical system. On the opposite side were the children of the new ruling class formed by party members, heroes of the revolution, party cadres and officials who, despite a 'stainless class' background, could not match the level

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<sup>69</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China And The World Since 1750* (Basic Books, 2012), 292.

<sup>70</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping And The Transformation Of China* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 120.

of scholarship of their counterparts.

This rivalry, already palpable inside the classrooms, often erupted in serious clashes between the two factions when the students formed revolutionary groups and started roaming through the streets to respond to the call for revolution of Chairman Mao.

In January of 1967 a third phase of the Cultural Revolution began when Beijing authorized the Red Guards to seize the power and displace revisionist officials and party members. Veterans of the party and of the political scene were ousted and replaced by young comrades.

In support of the revolution and to help the struggle against revisionism Mao sent the People Liberation Army (PLA) which up to that point had not yet been involved in the political turmoil. The army read the task of opposing all counter revolutionary organizations in its own way and took the chance to disband all militant groups opposing its own interests.

The situation soon turned out in a civil war-like scenario in which the army was arresting and opposing Red Guards who, on their part, tried to raid and enter army bases and facilities. One of this episode happened when the PLA protected Daqing oil fields in Heilongjiang province, North Eastern China, from Red Guards units, (one of them led by Mao Zedong's own nephew), that wanted to take over the installations where China was undertaking a secret project to develop the hydrogen bomb.<sup>71</sup>

Finally in a last desperate attempt to regain control of the country Mao, in July 1968, disbanded the Red Guards and gave the army the order to form revolutionary committees in the different provinces of China.

The outcome was that most of the revolutionary committees were constituted of members of the army. In this way the PLA increased its power all over the country and its influence became dominant in the government of China.

This leads us to the fourth and last phase of the Cultural Revolution,

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<sup>71</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search For Modern China* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 610.

from July 1968 to April 1969. During this last phase most of the leadership was constituted by military personnel. At the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969 a new party constitution was issued in order to replace the previous one dating back to 1956. In the new text was emphasized class struggle and Mao's Thought but it was overall much briefer than the previous one with lots of points regarding party organisation left incomplete.

Even though we can consider the one mentioned above the last phase of the Cultural Revolution, this chapter of Chinese history completely closed only in 1976. In fact only after Mao's death on 9 September 1976, the Gang of Four which had been the more radical faction and fervent instigator of the Cultural Revolution was arrested on October the 6th by order of the new premier Hua Guofeng. Former premier Zhou Enlai had passed away in January of the same year.

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

During the turmoil and intense chaos at every level of the Chinese administration and with a rising xenophobia permeating the society, it is hardly surprising that during the Cultural Revolution foreign relations with other countries encountered very hard times.

The Red Guards stormed the Foreign Ministry in June 1967 destroying records and documents. The same minister for foreign affairs Chen Yi was accused of revisionism and forced to make self-criticism before a shouting crowd.

Chinese embassies and Chinese diplomatic missions become the centres for the diffusion of Mao Zedong Thought abroad, often compromising diplomatic ties with the hosting countries. Having a foreign embassy shouting slogan against local governments and inciting local citizens to join the Chinese revolution, it was obviously not a wise way to strengthen international relations.

Some countries, like Burma and Cambodia, decided to break off relations, most of the Chinese ambassadors had to be recalled and

international trade declined.<sup>72</sup>

Chinese students clashed with Soviet police in Moscow. Indian diplomatic staff was beaten at Beijing Airport after being expelled. One of the worst episode happened to the British embassy in Beijing. In the previous months the British territory of Hong Kong had been theatre of riots and fights between Communists demonstrators and the local police. In response to some of these episodes Hong Kong authorities closed down three Communist newspapers and arrested some of the staff. On 20 August 1967 the Chinese, in an official protest, asked to the British mission in Beijing to release those who had been arrested giving an ultimatum of forty-eight hours. When the ultimatum expired on August 22 we can have a clear picture of what happened reading the dispatch sent by the British chargé d'affaires Hopson to British Foreign Secretary George Brown:

*“As night fell, the crowd outside increased rapidly in numbers (the official Chinese report put it as 10,000). They were quiet and orderly, sitting down and packed tight in their ranks, while the preparations for the drama were made. Searchlights and loudspeakers were beamed at our building, and a sort of proscenium was rigged up over our gateway. There were speeches, recitations, songs, and a rather festive atmosphere prevailed. We did not know that the audience were later to take over the role of actors in the grand finale . . . We dined together in the office hall off a dinner of tinned sausages and peas, claret and biscuits and cheese, prepared by the ladies. After dinner I went to the first floor [American second floor] to play bridge, while those of the staff who were not at work watched Peter Sellers in a film entitled not inappropriately, “The Wrong Arm of the Law”! . . .*

*At 10:30 p.m. I had just bid “Three no-trumps,” when I heard a roar from the crowd outside. I ran to the window, which looked over the main gateway, and saw that the masses had risen to their feet and were surging like an angry sea against the small*

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<sup>72</sup> John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Belknap Press, Second Enlarged Edition, 2006), 396-397.



*cordon of soldiers, who linked arms three deep before the gates. It was an extraordinary sight which will remain imprinted on my memory . . .*

*Card players, film-goers and all [twenty-three, including five women] moved at speed into the area on the ground floor leading to the secure zone . . .*

*Outside the crowd broke the glass of the windows, but the bars and plywood shutters held . . . the mob then started to burn straw at the windows. We threw water through the gaps, but the room began to fill with smoke . . . Smoke in the room was making breathing difficult, we could see the glare of many fires, and as it was now clear that the mob would soon be through the wall and there was a danger that we should be burned alive if we stayed, I gave orders for the emergency exit to be opened . . . The mob greeted us with howls of exultation and immediately set about us with everything they had. The time was then about 11:10 p.m., barely 40 minutes since the attack began.*

*From that moment we were split up, except the girls who all had one or two men with orders to stick by them. We were haled by our hair, half-strangled with our ties, kicked and beaten on the head with bamboo poles. I do not know how long this lasted but I found myself eventually more or less out on my feet, by what turned out to be the side gate of the compound, though I had little idea where I was at the time . . . Most of the staff who had been at the Office had had similar experiences to my own. Some were paraded up and down, forced to their knees and photographed in humiliating postures. All were beaten and kicked, and the girls were not spared lewd attentions from the prying fingers of the mob. Most of those who were wearing wrist-watches had them removed, and shirts, trousers and knickers were torn. So much for the morals of the Red Guards . . . Most of the staff were eventually rescued by the army and plain-clothes police agents and put temporarily in police-boxes as I was . . .*

*The Office is a total loss, though the strong room was*

*untouched. All official transport was destroyed except the heavy lorry, and one bus which we kept for emergencies in a garage in the international compound. My house was sacked and its contents including my clothes destroyed. The signed photograph of The Queen, which I had earlier placed in the security zone of the Office, survived though slightly singed.”*<sup>73</sup>

This climate of acute hysteria in China had consequences also for the solid and long lasting relation with North Korea.

In its continuous swinging back and forth between the Soviet camp and the Chinese one in an attempt to extract the maximum amount of aid from both of the sides and maximise the rivalry between the two Communist giants that came out from the Sino-Soviet split, in 1965 the DPRK decided to distance itself from China and lean a bit more towards the Soviet side.

In the first half of 1960 North Korea had move very close to the PRC, in part for its long tradition of friendship and comradeship dating back to the Korean War but also for the distrust and little sympathy that Kim Il Sung had for the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

Kim Il Sung low consideration of Khrushchev has many reasons that go beyond a mere personal antipathy.

In February 1956 at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in a famous secret speech for a selected audience Khrushchev denounced Stalin and his crimes along with his cult of personality. Such a harsh critique and repudiation of who was consider to be one of the two pillars of Communism together with Lenin, it was like a bomb placed just at the core of the world proletarian movement that could disintegrate not only the Soviet Communist society but could trigger a domino-like effect in all the other communist countries. The uprising that broke out in Hungary later the same year was a clear example.

It was like a son had betrayed that father who raised him since he was born and in a society such the Korean one, like the Chinese,

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<sup>73</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 225-226.

where Confucianism was still playing a major role in interpersonal ties, disowning your own father was something that could not be accepted. Kim Il Sung would never forgive Khrushchev for that. Moreover Stalin had been the one who favoured Kim during 1940s and it was Stalin that chose Kim as leader of the new born North Korean state. The Great Leader must have had the feeling the he owned his paramount position to the Marshal.

Khrushchev attack was also directed to the cult of personality that surrounded Stalin figure and wanted to promote a new kind of “collective leadership”. This must have sounded like anathema to Kim who, just in those years, was building his own cult of personality and who, up to that moment, had been working very hard to eliminate every minimal dissent to his choices and to purge everyone who could had obstructed his indisputable leadership.

As Khrushchev new approach to international politics called for more dialogue and less confrontation with the “imperialist front”, the DPRK accused the new leadership in Moscow of revisionism and of being too soft and cooperative with the United States. Another blow to what was and already a profound distrust Kim had for Khrushchev was the unfolding and the outcome of the Cuban crisis in 1962. In Kim's eyes the Soviet Union could easily betray its own allies for the sake of personal interest and the fact the this time the victim was a small country like Cuba certainly made the Korean leader drawing some analogies with North Korea. No wonder then that during the first half of 1960 North Korea, without rejecting economic and military aid from Moscow, decided to keep much closer to its old brother China.

In 1964 the situation started to change. Khrushchev was ousted by his own comrades and in October Leonid Brezhnev had been appointed as new General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. At home North Korean economy was not giving optimistic results and the Korean leadership probably noticed that too close relations with Beijing had cool down Soviet generosity in term of aid, causing additional distress to the state accounts.

Moscow envisaged the possibility of pulling back Pyongyang under its influence.

*“Some new aspects in Sino-Korean relations at the end of 1964 and at the beginning of 1965 . . . might generally be characterized as an attempt by the Korean government to abandon the unilateral orientation toward China . . .*

*The unilateral orientation toward China has entailed a worsening of the political and economic ties between the DPRK and the USSR and the European socialist countries, and this in turn has become one of the reasons for the serious economic difficulties of the DPRK.”* <sup>74</sup>

On May 31, 1965, the Soviet Union and North Korea signed a military agreement that would provide the Asian country with anti-aircraft missiles, jet fuels and spare parts.

In parallel relations between Beijing and Pyongyang started to cool down.

Chinese propaganda was becoming increasingly aggressive. A first hint of what will later become deliberate attacks during the following years of the Cultural Revolution.

Disagreement on how to support North Vietnam and oppose the American imperialist started to emerge as the conflict in South East Asia began to escalate in 1965.

Despite this, we still need to remember that one of the main reasons for Pyongyang to rebuild relations with Soviets was need for economic aid as economy in North Korea was starting to fall behind expectations.

A letter from the Czechoslovak Ambassador in North Korea depicts clearly Pyongyang main aims in its change of foreign policy caused by a mixture of economic difficulties at home, tension with China and need for economic help.

*“As for the relations to the PRC, direct contacts have weakened noticeably (exchange of delegations almost*

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<sup>74</sup> "Excerpts from the Report of the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang, 'Some New Aspects of Korean-Chinese Relations in the First Half of 1965'" June 04, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 21, papka 106, delo 20, listy 14-27. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110503>

*stopped). It is evident from the conversation of Kim Il Sung with the Soviet Ambassador Moskovskyi before his return to the homeland, that the KWP is trying to distance itself from the latest slanderous materials of the Chinese CP, and that it has certain reservations about the PRC attitude to Vietnam and to Soviet aid to the DRVN. Recent Chinese slanderous materials did not find their way into the Korean press nor the confidential bulletin CTAK . . .*

*Sending a high level delegation for celebrations in the GDR and a high level military delegation to Moscow, indicate that the Korean side is currently interested in certain improvement of contacts with our countries . . .*

*We think the KWP is taking these steps due to economic interests and also due to the necessity to increase defense readiness of the DPRK . . .*

*Further deepening of economic difficulties was characteristic for the internal situation in the DPRK. The agriculture, too, is facing serious problems because sowing of rice seedlings was delayed almost by a month due to dry and cold spring, and shortage of water limited possibilities of rice paddies irrigation.”<sup>75</sup>*

North Korea rapprochement with the Soviet Union abroad and brewing antagonism inside the Chinese Communist Party, contribute to indispose China which for the first time started to speak in an unusual unfriendly manner to Pyongyang. On July 20, 1965, a North Korean embassy official leaked to the daily newspaper “The Indian Express” (New Delhi) the news that China had claimed, as a compensation for its support during the Korean War, an area of North Korean territory near Mt. Paektu of the size of about 260 square kilometres.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "On the Development of Situation in the DPRK in May 1965" May, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Czech Foreign Ministry Archives. Translated for NKIDP by Adolf Kotlik.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114568>

<sup>76</sup> Chin O. Chung, *Pyongyang Between Peking and Moscow: North Korea's Involvement In The Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (University of Alabama Press,

Another point of disagreement was the extent of aid and support appropriate to sustain the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in its struggle against the American imperialists. The conflict in Indochina was rapidly escalating and since 1965 regular combat units were deployed by the United States.

China saw the conflict in Vietnam has another occasion for competition and rivalry with the Soviet Union and often the two communists countries obstructed each other, rather than cooperate, over how and to which extent they would be involve in the Vietnam War.

In the eyes of the Korean leadership China's reticent attitude toward the conflict and its constant frictions with the Soviet Union instead of an overt, friendly cooperation under the banner of a united Communist front, had the hues of opportunism rather than those of genuine comradeship. In an atmosphere of growing tension North Korea started to accuse China of not doing enough for the well of world Communism and China responded blaming North Korea for having a friendly attitude toward the Soviet revisionists.

*“The Korean comrades, in their conversations with Alan Winnington, directed stinging criticisms . . . against the PRC. Criticism was voiced towards the PRC for rejecting joint actions to support Vietnam.”<sup>77</sup>*

Kim Il Sung and North Korean leadership point of view on the matter was reported during a meeting with Secretary General Brezhnev:

*“On Vietnam. They highly value the aid of the Soviet Union and all our political actions . . . They know well the weapons and the volume and the means, they know all we do. And they completely disagree with and censure the slanderous policies of the Chinese who spread [the rumours] that our aid is*

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1978), 120.

<sup>77</sup> "Letter from GDR Embassy in the DPRK to State Secretary Hegen" December 12, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archives of the Foreign Office, Berlin, Collection MfAA, G-A 316. Obtained by Bernd Schaefer and translated by Karen Riechert. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114569>

*insignificant, does not have such a [great] effect and that we must provide more aid, not even to mention that shameless slander, as I would put it, that we have conspired with the American imperialists to encircle China.”*<sup>78</sup>

Disagreement on foreign policy towards Vietnam was just a little crack in the cemented relations between the two countries but it soon became clear that a deeper fracture was about to be opened. At first, to respond to Chinese provocations, the Koreans attacked what was seen a wrong ideology behind the Cultural Revolution and the way of conducting a revolution itself:

*“The Korean leaders condemn the Chinese leaders for their great power chauvinism, dogmatism, and "left" opportunism. According to statements of the Korean comrades the Chinese do not take changed reality into account, dogmatically repeat individual Marxist-Leninist positions, and drive people to extreme actions under “archaic” and revolutionary slogans. The Korean leadership is closely following events associated with the conduct of the so-called "Cultural Revolution" in China. In a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in November of this year Kim Il Sung said, "The Chinese want to conduct a cultural revolution at one stroke. Is this not an example of left opportunism on the part of the CPC and its leaders?”*<sup>79</sup>

At first the North Koreans did not want to get involved in this kind of provocations. To protect its own citizens from poisonous words coming from Chinese sources, the leadership first tried to shield the

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<sup>78</sup> "Excerpts from Leonid Brezhnev's May 1966 Speech on Talks with Kim Il Sung" May 27, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, fond 2, opis 3, delo 18, pp. 82-88. Translated for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114535>

<sup>79</sup> "First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korean Reports on Sino-Korean Relations in 1966 " December 02, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 38-49. Obtained for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko and translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114591>

country in an attempt to insulate the society and avoid the exposure to the attacks of the Chinese propaganda.

*“The Korean leadership has recently taken a number of steps to keep the country's population from being influenced by Chinese propaganda. Sino-Korean cultural exchanges have been reduced to zero. The exchanges of other delegations have been sharply reduced. Almost no materials from China are published in the Korean press. The 30-minute Korean language program of news from China on the radio rebroadcasting network has been halted.”*<sup>80</sup>

Objections on the ideological frame of the Cultural Revolution quickly took more straightforward tones.

*“Comrade Kim Il Sung expressed in his statements on this subject that the KWP considers the so-called Cultural Revolution in China as a massive idiocy with a large impact on the DPRK as well.”*<sup>81</sup>

Economic ties and cooperation in other sectors started to suffer from the tense atmosphere of acrimony which lingered between the one-time comrades.

*“Trade relations between the two countries are stagnating, it happens more and more frequently that there are problems concerning the deadlines of Chinese shipments. Cultural and scientific-technological cooperation practically stands still.”*<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Excerpts from a 30 December 1966 Memo of the Soviet Embassy to the DPRK (A. Borunkov) about Embassy Measures against Chinese Anti-Soviet Propaganda in the DPRK" December 30, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 50-56. Obtained for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko and translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116692>

<sup>81</sup> "Note on a Conversation with the 1st Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, Comrade Zvetkov, on 15 March 1967 " March 16, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PoIA AA, MfAA, G-A 364. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116647>

<sup>82</sup> "Report, Embassy of Hungary in China to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry"



*“The PR China has stopped its aid to the DPRK in the following areas:*

- Coke and gas coal (previously 2.5 million tons annually)*
- Oil and oil products (20,000 tons per month, i.e. 250,000 tons per year)*

*In addition, they do not deliver any more salt, vegetable oil and cotton. The DPRK government has been officially informed about this by the Chinese side.”*<sup>83</sup>

Innocent victims of the fury of Mao's acolytes had been the ethnic Korean community leaving in Chinese territory on the border with North Korea.

*“Recently dead bodies are said to have been found in a freight train arriving into the DPRK from China via Sinuiju. They were Koreans living in North Eastern China. People are said to get injured or killed in incidents between Maoist Red Guards and members from the Korean minority in the PRC. The dead bodies were placed on the freight train bound to the DPRK. The freight cars also had anti-Korean slogans written on. Like for instance: “See, that’s how you will fare as well, you little revisionists!””*<sup>84</sup>

Quarrels on the border became routine:

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April 11, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j China, 1967, 59. doboz, 1, 001136/6/1967. Translated by Balázs Szalontai.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116652>

<sup>83</sup> "Note on a Conversation with the Acting Ambassador of the People's Republic of Poland, Comrade Pudisz, on 9 October 1967 between 1000 and 1130 hours in the Polish Embassy. " October 20, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PolA AA, MfAA, C 149/75. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116640>

<sup>84</sup> "Note on a Conversation with the Acting Ambassador of the People's Republic of Poland, Comrade Pudisz, on 9 October 1967 between 1000 and 1130 hours in the Polish Embassy. " October 20, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PolA AA, MfAA, C 149/75. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116640>

*“ . . . recently a Korean train was halted for several days at the border since the driver refused to accept a Mao badge. Kim Il Sung furthermore stated to the Soviet Ambassador that the DPRK has a long border with China and everything conceivable can happen.”*<sup>85</sup>

And quarrels soon became out-and-out incursions of Chinese troops in North Korean territory. The region of the Yalu River and bordering Mountain Paektu saw incursions of Chinese forces. Clashes occurred in late 1967. In March and December 1968 it was reported that the Chinese-North Korean border was closed on the Chinese side and similar episodes happened in 1969 as well.

*“During the Cultural Revolution there were major propaganda actions against us on the Yalu. There were provocations in North Korea at the time of the Chinese/Soviet conflicts on the Ussuri in 1969. While I was recuperating in the country, I received a call from our Minister of State Security that Chinese troops were crossing the Tumen [River] onto our territory. I gave the order not to shoot, but to let them come ahead so that we could take them on our territory, if necessary. We sent a group of soldiers there. Then the Chinese withdrew.”*<sup>86</sup>

Finally, at the apex of Chinese fierce criticism, not even the Great Leader was spared and more and more attacks directed to Kim Il Sung himself started to find a place in the Chinese propaganda. In the international news column of the October 27 issue of the Red Guard newspaper named Dongfanghong we can read:

*“In recent times the Korean revisionists have shown an*

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<sup>85</sup> "50th Anniversary of the October Revolution in the DPRK" November 13, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PolA AA, MfAA, C 146/75. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116659>

<sup>86</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Erich Honecker and Kim Il Sung" May 31, 1984, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, 2460. Translated by Grace Leonard.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113198>

*anti-Chinese tendency that is becoming more and more insane. The Korean revisionists are terrified by the Cultural Revolution. They say that nearly all intellectuals were killed in the Cultural Revolution. What scoundrels they are, damn it! Anxious to pursue a policy of cooperating with the Soviet Union and opposing China, the Korean revisionists wholly deny the immense distinction that our heroic volunteers gained in the course of the anti-American resistance war aimed at helping Korea. Mad with rage, the gang of Kim Il Sung is slandering us by claiming that the assistance [we] gave to Korea during the anti-American war was motivated by our “national egoism” and we did that “for our own good.” It is even more hateful that the Korean revisionists are slandering us by claiming that the Korean War was “provoked” by us. This is how low the Korean revisionists have fallen! Now they are even digging up the graves of our volunteers who heroically sacrificed their lives in the Korean War! What more will we tolerate if we tolerate that? We sternly warn Kim Il Sung and his ilk that those who cooperate with the USA and the revisionists, and pursue an anti-Chinese policy, will come to a bad end. Sooner or later, the Korean people will rise up and settle up with you.”*<sup>87</sup>

In Beijing, posters hanged around the city and written by the Red Guards showed even further creativity and literary talent by the young revolutionaries. The range of the slogans went from calling Kim Il Sung a “fat revisionist” or “disciple of Khrushchev”<sup>88</sup> to accuse him of having a bourgeois lifestyle and earning ten times as much as the average worker in his country.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "Report, Embassy of Hungary in China to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 20 November 1967" November 20, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j China, 1967, 59. doboz, 1, 001187/62/1967. Translated by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116664>

<sup>88</sup> Chin O. Chung, *Pyongyang Between Peking and Moscow: North Korea's Involvement In The Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (University of Alabama Press, 1978), 130.

<sup>89</sup> Bernanrd Schaefer, *North Korean “Adventurism” and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972*, Working Paper 44 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project,

Some posters even claimed that Kim had been overthrown by a coup d'état or call for his removal from power.<sup>90</sup>

What is very important to notice is that direct and crude attacks to Kim Il Sung never came from official sources of the Chinese Communist Party but were more the results of Red Guards actions, slogans, posters or propaganda.<sup>91</sup>

What we can assume is that while officially there was a deep strain in the relations between the two countries, the most ferocious attacks at the Korean leadership were the sign of the rising difficulty that the Chinese leadership was having in keeping the actions and words of the Red Guards under control. A mixture of incapability of straining the tornado of revolutionary enthusiasm that was storming around China and Mao's acquiescence towards everything his young pupils were ready to do and say in his name and for the sake of the Cultural Revolution, often turned out to exceed by far the official position of the Chinese government and worsen to an even deeper extent the already feeble relations with the other countries and in particular with North Korea.

Kim Il Sung was indeed very upset about the turmoil raised on his border by the Cultural Revolution but even in such a tense situation he applied a considerate dose of pragmatism in order to handle the issue and minimize the damage for North Korea.

The Korean leader decided to seal his country and limit contacts with China to avoid the Korean population to be exposed to any provocation against him and his regime. In parallel he reinforced domestic propaganda and strengthened his cult of personality to unprecedented levels.<sup>92</sup>

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Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2004), 7-8.

<sup>90</sup> Chin O. Chung, *Pyongyang Between Peking and Moscow: North Korea's Involvement In The Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (University of Alabama Press, 1978), 129.

<sup>91</sup> Bernanrd Schaefer, *North Korean "Adventurism" and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972*, Working Paper 44 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2004), 9.

<sup>92</sup> "Letter from GDR Embassy in the DPRK to State Secretary Hegen" December 22, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PoIA AA, MfAA, GA 360. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Bernd Shaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113367>

He opted for a mild reaction to the harsh criticisms of the Red Guards, a wait-and-see approach only sometimes dotted with counter attacks in the form of editorials published on the Rodong Sinmun.

Kim was well aware of North Korea economic dependence on China as well as the need to have his powerful neighbour ready to ensure a prompt support in case of military aggression by the United States and South Korea.

It seems like Kim knew that the difficult time in the Sino-North Korean relations caused by the Cultural Revolution would have been painful to endure but not everlasting and that, once passed, cooperation with his long-time ally would have quickly been restored.

*“The Chinese have castigated the Soviet Union and even us as revisionists. It lasted about 5 years in our case, and we had to keep our peace because of our situation. We had to be patient.”*<sup>93</sup>

Kim’s patience seemed to be rewarded starting from 1969.

In 1968 Mao gave the order to disband the Red Guards bringing to an end a major source of criticism and vicious propaganda against the Korean regime and with the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in April 1969 the most acute phase of the Cultural Revolution came to an end. From that moment we can sense the beginning of the thaw in the relations of the two countries.

Already in 1968 Hungarian diplomatic sources refer to a personal message sent by Premier Zhou Enlai to Kim Il Sung proposing a joint normalization of Sino-Korean relations and to leave behind past quarrels and misunderstandings.<sup>94</sup>

In October 1969 for the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the

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<sup>93</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Erich Honecker and Kim Il Sung" May 31, 1984, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, 2460. Translated by Grace Leonard.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113198>

<sup>94</sup> "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, TOP SECRET, No. 76.054, Urgent" March 01, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Political Affairs Fond, Telegrams from Pyongyang, TOP SECRET, 1968, Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Eliza Gheorghe. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113965>

People Republic of China, North Korea sent a special delegation headed by Choe Yong-Geon, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's assembly, to Beijing to take part in the celebration of the country. It was the first time since 1965. He was warmly welcomed by Premier Zhou Enlai at the airport and given a preferential seat beside Chairman Mao at the parade held at Tiananmen Square on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October. In a conversation between the two Mao stated:

*“The relations between our two countries are special, and we should improve our relations. Our aims are identical. During the years of resistance against Japan, the Korean comrades fought against the enemy together with us for a long time. During the war against the Americans, we also fought side by side with the Korean comrades. In the future, it is possible that we will do the same thing again. In opposing Khrushchev's revisionism, we stood together on the same side! Toward the Soviet revisionists, we may not condemn them every day. It does not necessarily work if we condemn them every day. But we will continuously condemn them . . . We have been old friends.”*<sup>95</sup>

In January 1970 the two countries signed the Yalu and Tumen Rivers Navigation Agreement. In February a new North Korean ambassador was sent to Beijing and the following month a new Chinese ambassador was appointed to Pyongyang.<sup>96</sup> In November China renounced to its claim of a 160 square kilometers around Mount Paektu.

Probably the most important event of the year came in April when for three days, (the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of April), Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai

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<sup>95</sup> "Mao Zedong's Conversation with North Korean Official Choe Yong-geon (Excerpt), 1 October 1969, at the Tiananmen Gate" October 01, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu, vol. 3, part 1, p. 522 <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111509>

<sup>96</sup> Daniel Gomà Pinilla, "Border Disputes between China and North Korea", China Perspectives [Online], 52 | March-April 2004, Online since 19 April 2007, connection on 04 April 2014. <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/806>

visited North Korea. It was the first time since 1963 that China was sending a top-level delegation to North Korea, the last one being the visit of President Liu Shaoqi. This was a clear sign of China's will to restore peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbor and ally as Zhou stated in his speech after his arrival at Pyongyang airport. Once again he recalled China and North Korea brotherhood and their blood-sealed friendship emphasizing that the two countries were closed as lips and teeth.

During the three days visit Zhou discussed with the Korean leadership issues concerning the navigation of the Yalu and Tumen rivers, which mark the Sino-North Korean border, and the joint utilization of hydropower plants built in the area.<sup>97</sup>

Another important matter was the question of the citizenship of the Korean and Chinese national minorities living on each other's territory. On this issue is very important the declaration of the State Council made in August which acknowledged that episodes of violence occurred between Chinese and Korean nationals living on the border.

*"Korean nationals have been writing to [government] departments to report that they have been discriminated against and beaten. During the Cultural Revolution, they were criticized and struggled against, their homes were ransacked, and their passports were confiscated; the hardships encountered by those who were injured during work have [also] not been resolved. According to the letters that we have received, it seems that these types of situations are quite common in a number of regions. If these practices are real, then they are not in accordance with the policies of the Central Committee. Based on the current Sino-Korean relationship, these issues should be viewed as important and swiftly corrected. The relevant work units should carry out an investigation and render an appropriate solution . . .*

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<sup>97</sup> "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry" May 05, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1970, 54. doboz, 81, 00843/7/1970. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116578>

*Korean nationals should be taken care of and treated as friends. If they encounter any problem, they should be treated fairly and reasonably and should not be discriminated against or insulted . . .*

*Work units and street masses cannot attack, detain, or secretly detain Korean nationals.”*<sup>98</sup>

With the end of 1970 we can consider the relation between China and the Democratic People Republic of Korea restored at pre-Cultural Revolution level. Economic assistance as well as cultural cooperation started to get back on track and in the media of both countries the political leadership was, once again, frequently stressing the common struggle against imperialism, capitalism, bourgeoisie and American military threat. Often referring to the glorious time of the Korean conflict when side by side the two armies “defeated” the imperialist aggressors, terms like brotherhood, comradeship, everlasting friendship became again the main lexicon used by the two countries to describe their relation.

We can establish a relation of inverse proportionality between the Sino-North Korean relation and evolution and involution of the Cultural Revolution. In the second half of the 1960s there was a strictly related connection between China domestic policy and foreign relation with North Korea.

As the fervour of the Cultural Revolution was rising and internal turmoil increasing from 1966, the level of cooperation and assistance between the two countries was progressively decreasing. At the same time, from 1968, when the situation inside China was becoming more stable and politics was once again taking the control of the masses, the dialogue with Kim Il Sung regime was swiftly returning to high level of enthusiasm.

To see the whole picture as a mathematical function: raising turmoil inside China, waning cooperation with North Korea; decreasing level

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<sup>98</sup> "Opinions from the State Council on Correctly Administering the Korean Nationals Issue" August 10, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Hebei Provincial Archives 1057-2-1. P139. Obtained for NKIDP by Shen Zhihua and translated for NKIDP by Jeffrey Wang.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115329>



of instability in the domestic scene of Mao's country, enhancement of the two countries' ties.

In the years between 1965 and 1969 the old friendship between China and North Korea touched the bottom and this has definitely been the period when the two countries relation was most tense. Nevertheless it seems that this storm did not cause any wound so deep to leave any scar between the two. After a mild fight, only with little bruises and shaking each other's hand, from 1970 on, China and North Korea were ready again to step in, side by side, in the international scene.

## 5. FRIENDSHIP AND COMPROMISE, 1971-1976

After the dark years of the Cultural Revolution when the relations between China and North Korea touched their lowest point, China realized that its international isolation was not bringing any benefit to the country and rushed to restore positive and cooperative relations with North Korea. At the same time Kim Il Sung had spent the second half of the 1960s waiting patiently that the internal turmoil in China and the revolutionary fervour of the Red Guards cooled down to reinstate a productive dialogue with his neighbour and ally.

As we have seen at the end of the previous chapter, with the visit of Premier Zhou Enlai to North Korea in 1970, a friendly relation between the two countries was fully re-established. In 1971 a sense of guilt felt by the Chinese side for their behaviour during the Cultural Revolution can be noticed. Some parts of the Chinese leadership were well aware of their responsibility for the deterioration of the relations between the two countries. In a document from the Hebei Provincial Archives dating June 1971 Premier Zhou Enlai can be heard lecturing a Chinese delegation ready to be sent to North Korea. Zhou recommended self-criticism and suggested to apologize for the many mistakes made by the Chinese party during the tumultuous years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

*“I hasten to tell you (referring to Comrade Shao Shihua) to inform them [of our affairs]. Otherwise we are not being open and upright towards our brothers-in-arms. We often talk much about our achievements, [and] when we discuss our weaknesses, we only speak of principles and not specifics. Covering up our mistakes is not in accordance with Maoist thinking. Why should you be embarrassed to speak of mistakes? The “16 May Corps” was trying to destroy Sino-Korean friendship . . . For our brothers-in-arms, we must humbly serve them with one’s heart and soul, [we] must respect them. When I spoke with Premier Kim in Pyongyang, I*

*spoke of our mistakes . . .*

*In 1967, Comrades Choe Yong-geon and Pak Seong-cheol [Pak Song Chol] came to China. We told them then that, despite our different views, we will never [criticize by] pointing names [at you] in the newspapers. But there were some bad people among us . . . they were very active in the Northeast [of China]. There was a classroom in Jilin's Yuwen Middle School which was dedicated to Premier Kim, [but] it was destroyed. It is currently being repaired . . . In Sino-Korean relations, the Chinese side has made more mistakes [than the Koreans] . . .*

*Because of the erroneous line within the Chinese Party, our Party is more responsible [for the mistakes] within Chinese-Korean relations . . .*

*If Premier Kim receives you, then you must provide a good apology. You can talk about any of our shortcomings and mistakes.”<sup>99</sup>*

A friendly dialogue was officially restored, however at the beginning of the 1970s a new challenge was just around the corner. China was considering a rapprochement with the United States, the superpower that had been the archenemy of both the Maoist regime and Kim Il Sung.

On July 16, 1971, Nixon made public his intention of visiting Beijing in 1972. Despite the fact that North Korea preferred to see the visit of the American president to China as the trip of a defeated rather than a triumphal march, Pyongyang had some concerns about the thaw of the relations between its ally and its enemy. China made its best to reassure the North Koreans that a rapprochement with the United States would have no consequences for Sino-North Korean relations. Beijing proclaimed July 9-15 as the “Chinese-Korean Friendship

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<sup>99</sup> "Record of Conversation: Zhou Enlai on the Apology to North Korea" June 15, 1971, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Hebei Provincial Archives, 855-10-80-9. P110-125. Obtained for NKIDP by Shen Zhihua and translated for NKIDP by Jeffrey Wang. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115333>

Week” and in the same days a delegation was sent to Pyongyang to explain the reasons of the dialogue with the Americans. The Chinese invited a North Korean delegation to go to China and during the visit that took place between August 8-16, 1971, an economic agreement for mutual aid and cooperation was signed. Shortly after, from August 18 to September 9, 1971, another North Korean delegation, this time representing the military forces, visited Beijing and an agreement, according to which the Chinese would provide military aid to North Korea, was signed. After these signs of good will from China and being assured of further economic and military support, Kim Il Sung declared that he favoured Nixon’s trip to Beijing as it would ease tensions between China and the United States and bring greater stability in the area. Kim also hoped that China could put pressure on the United States and force them to withdraw their troops from South Korea.

*“Nixon would not arrive in Beijing as a victor but as a defeated. This Korean position had been reiterated in the [Kim Il Sung] interview with [the Japanese newspaper] “Yomiuri Shimbun” [in January 1972]. The Nixon visit was interpreted as forced upon the American president. This way the Korean side assisted China’s policy and agreed to the discussion of the Korean question in the talks . . .*

*It can be expected in this context that steps will be taken to create a favorable situation for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. The Korean leadership views such as its main objective in the near future. Information exists according to which the Korean leadership has been continuously informed by secret material about the course of negotiations with Nixon.”*<sup>100</sup>

In the years following President Nixon visit to Beijing, China and

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<sup>100</sup> "Note on a Conversation with the 1st Secretary of the USSR Embassy, Comrade Kurbatov, on 10 March 1972 in the GDR Embassy " March 13, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PoIA AA, MfAA, C 1080/78. Obtained for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer and translated for NKIDP by Karen Riechert. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110820>

North Korea kept warm and close relationships and between 1973 and 1975 many delegations were sent from one country to the other to strengthen economic and military cooperation. Beijing supported North-South Korean dialogue and the reunification policies proposed by Kim Il Sung. In occasion of the twenty-sixth anniversary of the foundation of North Korea the Chinese Communist Party official newspaper, Renmin Ribao, published an article that, with ample rhetoric, emphasized the eternal friendship between the two countries, cemented in blood at the time of the common struggle against the aggressors during the years of the Korean War. The following year an almost identical article was published to celebrate the same recurrence.

What was probably the most important event of those years was Kim Il Sung's visit to Beijing where he met Mao Zedong in 1975. The visit was probably aimed at assuring Chinese backing in the forthcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly that was going to debate the Korean issue. More economic aid was also on Kim's list of requests. At the same time, on the wave of the enthusiasm of the American debacle in Vietnam, Kim Il Sung envisaged for his country the same fate that blessed the North Vietnamese and sensed that it was the right time to launch another attempt to unify the Korean Peninsula. He was gently discouraged by the Chinese who saw no benefit in another clash with the South, especially now that they were committed to maintain peaceful relations with the United States.

Whatever benefit a rapprochement between China and the United States could bring to North Korea, it is clear that Kim Il Sung, even if he wanted, had not enough leverage to force China to give up its plan of normalizing relations with the Americans. In Kim's acceptance of the dialogue between China and the United States there certainly had been a good amount of self-imposed compromise. Kim knew that he was too dependent on China and his ailing economy could only go worse without the constant aid coming from his neighbour. Whether he was truly in favour of it or secretly against, the North Korean leader had little space to manoeuvre between the Chinese and the Americans and he could only accept the reality, at best trying to gain some benefit from the turning of the events.

The Chinese made up for lack of convergence between Kim Il Sung expectations and Chinese diffidence for a new military attempt to reunify the Korean peninsula increasing economic assistance to help North Korean struggling economy. An oil pipeline linking the two countries was completed in January 1976. Overall, in the same year there were eighteen Korean delegations visiting China and twelve Chinese delegations went to North Korea. Exchange of those delegations focused on the fields of trade, scientific-technological cooperation, culture, and sports.

In 1976, the following contractual agreements were signed:

- Agreement on Postal and Signal Communication
- Protocol about Navigation of Border Rivers
- Trade Protocol for 1976
- Plan for Cooperation of the Academies of Sciences for 1977/1978
- Protocol about Railway Border Traffic.<sup>101</sup>

1976 was a crucial year for China that on January 8 mourned the death of Premier Zhou Enlai and on September 9 that of Chairman Mao. The death the two most important figures of Chinese politics since the foundation of the People Republic in 1949 brought a period of instability with a power struggle that erupted within the Chinese Communist Party before the consolidation of Deng Xiaoping as the new paramount leader of the country erased any kind of factionalism. The death of Mao did not change the friendly relations between China and North Korea but rather shifted the focus of the cooperation from a comradeship to a mutual pursuing of national and geopolitical interests.

National interests always drive political decisions but under the “romantic revolutionary idealism” of Mao, concepts like comradeship, fraternal socialist assistance, struggle against imperialism, revolution of the masses were often stressed and emphasized as the pillars of the national politics. With the rise of Deng Xiaoping the approach changed radically, moving to economic pragmatism. Chinese

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<sup>101</sup> "On Relations between DPRK and PRC" November 17, 1977, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office, Berlin (PoIA AA), MfAA C 6857. Translated by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114128>

economic growth and development were now the top priority, the final goal of the revolution could wait as the most important thing to achieve first was the well-being of the population. From that moment on North Korea will become an important geopolitical ally but its role of brother-in-arms will be relegated to the memories of the revolutionary years. China soon moved to restore and normalize relations with former enemies like the United States and South Korea leaving to North Korea, in order to continue to receive economic and military aid, the only choice of playing its role of buffer on the Eastern border. A shift in priorities that nevertheless did not bring to an end that “friendship sealed in blood”.

## **6. SYMBOLISM IN THE SINO-NORTH KOREAN**

### **FRIENDSHIP**

Sino-North Korean friendship does not only dwell in the realm of international politics but is also characterized by a recurrent symbolism in the art and architecture of the two countries and often recalled in the media of both China and North Korea.

One of the symbols of Sino-North Korean friendship is what it is called the “Sino-North Korean Friendship Bridge” on the Yalu River which runs on the border between the two countries. The bridge links the two border cities of Dandong on the Chinese side and Sinuju on the North Korean side.

The bridge was built during the Japanese occupation at the end of the 1930s to connect the Korean peninsula, (at that time a Japanese colony), with the puppet state of Manchukuo which was de facto under control of the Japanese empire. The bridge had military and economic functions and it was used to facilitate the transportation of goods and troops. Previously there was also an iron bridge capable of rotating horizontally to permit the navigation of large ships. It was constructed during the last years of the Qing dynasty and finished by 1911. When the People’s Volunteer Army, in the end of 1950, entered the Korean War to push back American forces, the United States bombed the two bridges to destroy any possible way of supply for the Chinese soldiers.

The iron bridge, now called the Broken Bridge, (it has nothing to do with the bridge of the same name in Hangzhou), remained unutilized and became a symbol of the war and a tourist attraction. The bridge from the Japanese colonial time was rebuilt and now is what we call the Sino-North Korean Friendship Bridge. All the surrounding area had become a tourist attraction and in 2010 China has begun the construction of another bridge further downstream to promote economic development and trade in the region and particularly with North Korea.



The Friendship Bridge came to represent the union between North Korea and Communist China well before the breakout of the Korean War when during the years of the Chinese civil war (1946-1950) between the communist forces of Mao Zedong and the nationalists of Chang Kai-shek, Kim Il Sung offered material and logistical support to the communists. Many ethnic Koreans fought side by side with the Chinese communists to defeat the Guomindang forces laying the foundation of the future alliance between North Korea and China.

The Friendship Bridge on the Yalu represents the unbreakable link between China and North Korea and symbolize a union that overcame time and space.

The bridge overcomes space as it crosses all over the considerable width of the Yalu River like an arm of mutual help that stretches in both directions from one brother to another.

It runs through time as it stood over three different periods of history. It was there to link the two countries during the bitter days of the Japanese colonization, it helped to support Chinese Communist troops in their war against the nationalist, it faced ruin and rebirth during the common struggle against the American imperialists and it still stands there nowadays as an eternal manifestation of solidarity between the two East Asian countries.

The Korean War really was the turning point in Sino-North Korean relation, the time when the alliance blossomed and took the shape of an indestructible brotherhood. The common struggle of Chinese and Korean soldier fighting shoulder to shoulder against the common enemy forged the alliance in blood.

As Heonik Kwon put it:

*“Despite incessant assault by superior US firepower, the bridge was repeatedly repaired and rebuilt during the war. This last fact testifies to the unbreakable nature of North Korean–Chinese revolutionary solidarity, according to postwar North Korean narratives, and this “perpetual friendship” that defies all types of tests and overcomes adversity is what the Friendship Bridge is supposed to embody.”*<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Heonik Kwon, "The Korean War and Sino-North Korean Friendship," The

Another symbol of Sino-North Korean friendship is a monument called “The Tower of Friendship” which stands on a hill in Pyongyang, the country capital city. It was completed in 1959, the year after the Chinese soldiers of the People’s Volunteer Army left North Korea, where they were stationed since the end of the Korean War to help with the reconstruction of roads, railways and all the infrastructures destroyed by the American bombings. The cenotaph was inaugurated by President Kim Il Sung and Zhou Enlai and was renovated in 1984. The Tower is a thirty-meter-high memorial made of granite that commemorates the Chinese soldier who lost their lives during the Korean conflict. Among the records of the Chinese soldiers and officers kept inside the monument it can be read the name of the eldest son of Mao Zedong, Mao Anying, who died in action during the war at the age of 28, in November 1950.

The 1,025 stones that constitute the memorial recall the day the Chinese soldiers entered the war, the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1950.

The cenotaph, apart from being a war memorial, celebrates past, present and future of the Sino-North Korean friendship as the inscription on it tells us:

*“The martyrs of the Chinese People’s Volunteers who defeated our common enemy together with us under the banner of “Resist America, Aid Korea, Protect Family and Defend the Country”: Your eternal honor and the international friendship between the people of Korea and the people of China forged in blood shall shine over this country and this land forever.”*<sup>103</sup>

The tower has a pivotal role in testifying the common history of the two countries and in underlining their political ties as it is shown by the recurring visits that Chinese delegations pay to the memorial when they go to North Korea.

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Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 11, Issue 31, No. 4, August 12, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

Sino-North Korean friendship is emphasized not only in monuments and memorials but also through art and media. A prominent figure around which revolves some of the latest cultural productions is that of Mao Anying, the firstborn son of Chairman Mao Zedong and his wife Yang Kaihui. He studied in the Soviet Union and during the Second World War fought in the Red Army against Germany.

During the Korean War he assisted General Peng Dehuai in the military operations against the United States and the troops of the United Nations' members who took part in the conflict.

On November 25, 1950, Mao Anying was killed when at around 11 A.M. a B-26 started bombing the area where he was hiding.<sup>104</sup>

Since then the death of Mao Anying has been portrayed as the highest and most valuable example of sacrifice for the sake of the revolution. Most important is the fact that Mao Anying was buried and is still buried in North Korea, in the Cemetery for the Martyrs of the Chinese People's Volunteers, Hoichang County, South Pyong'an Province. As a sign of indissoluble friendship the Chinese government decided to leave the remains of the son of Mao Zedong in North Korea as a symbol of Chinese sacrifice in support of the North Korean ally.

In 2010 a TV series of more than thirty episodes was broadcasted on Chinese and North Korean televisions. In the first episode we can see Mao Anying nursemaid and adoptive mother, Madam So, visiting the grave of his stepson in North Korea and in the midst of bitter memories, recalling his story.

In one of the last episode Madam So asks Chairman Mao to bring the remains back to the motherland but Mao Zedong explains that Kim Il Sung himself has asked him to leave Mao Anying in North Korea as a sign of eternal friendship between the two countries. Mao Anying sacrificed his life for the liberation of the Korean people and now he is regarded not only as a son of the People Republic of China but also as a son of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. At the cemetery where Mao Anying rests the two characters of a Korean

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<sup>104</sup> 武立金 (Wu Lijin), 毛岸英在朝鲜战场 (Mao Anying Zai Chaoxian Zhanchang), 作家出版社(Zuojia Chubanshe 2006), 219-225. Wu Lijin, Mao Anying On The Battlefield Of The Korean War (Zuojia Press, 2006), 219-225.

grandmother and her orphaned granddaughter are shown taking care daily of his grave depicting North Korea as an adoptive mother for those Chinese soldiers who lost their life for the salvation of the allied country. In this case the Sino-Korean alliance runs deep to the extent that mere political ties are overcome and the relation between the two countries becomes one of consanguinity.

Another example of the Sino-North Korean friendship is the story called "Beyond Time" which recalls the adventures of war heroine An Ok Hee who is a North Korean woman whose husband is away fighting in the Korean War. She gives shelter to Lee, a Chinese soldier chased down by the Americans. When Lee is captured by the Americans, An Ok Hee sets off to search for him and save him. During the rescue mission she dies becoming a national hero and a martyr of the war in the attempt to liberate her motherland from the American invaders.

In other representations, as well as in art and literature, the theme of Korean people sacrificing their lives to save Chinese soldiers and vice versa is a theme commonly portrayed and recalled.

Such persistent presence and the many recurring references to the Sino-North Korean mutual support given and received during the bloody years of the Korean conflict testify the importance of the war as the crucial moment that forged the alliance between the two countries.

If had the Korean War not happened or had Mao Zedong not decided to enter the conflict to sustain his neighbour and to show to the United States China's iron will of opposing imperialism, there would have not been such a thing like Sino-Korean friendship or at least it would have not been this deep and strong.

The peculiarity of the relation between China and North Korea lies in the fact that it overcomes the political realm to embrace also the cultural and artistic one.

The Sino-North Korean case is one of the few where we can substitute terms like "relation" or "tie" with expressions, such "friendship" or sometimes even "kinship", which are often alien to the world of politics.

Art, literature and media of the two countries are dotted with symbols that recall a common history of struggle and a shared, revolutionary past. Symbolism has shown us that it can contribute to strengthen even further political ties.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thirty years of Sino-North Korean relations, from the end of the Second World War until the departure of Mao Zedong in 1976, had been characterized by an active and close cooperation even if times of misunderstandings and frictions occurred, especially in occasion of the August Incident in 1956 and in the second half of the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution. The relation between the two country is nowadays a debated topic, especially now that North Korea seems to possess the atomic bomb and have nuclear capability. This makes the regime on the North of the thirty-eight parallel one of the biggest source of instability in the area.

Western and regional powers understand that a dialogue with North Korea can not bypass China and thus I believe that a deeper understanding of the relations between the two neighbours is fundamental if we want to figure out a way to bring harmony in East Asia.

Many international observers wonder why China, who remain the only real ally of North Korea, does not give up its troublesome neighbour and continue to provide economic aid. In an attempt to reply to these questions I decided to go back to the origin of the alliance to highlight its reasons of being and its peculiarities. What has emerged is that the close relation between the two countries lies not only in national economic and geopolitical interests but it has also a deep cultural affinity that throughout the years has glued and intertwined the two countries at social, economic, military an political level.

Realism and pragmatic politics alone are not enough to explain a relation that survived the turns of history from the end of the Cold War to the market-oriented reforms of Deng Xiaoping. Realpolitik does not tell us why after almost seventy years the two countries still stand side by side in the international community. What I wanted to demonstrate in this work is that a strong perception of a cultural

affinity and a fraternal comradeship still lies at the base of the alliance. Skimming through these thirty years I have shown that the relations between the two countries had been able to maintain a positive trend even in time of difficulties and diverging national interests. Binding agent in these years had been that “friendship sealed in blood” dating back to the years of the Korean War when side by side the two countries fought against the common enemy of the United States. These two keywords of friendship and blood were continuously and still are often recalled by officials, politicians, media and newspapers of both countries. A recurrent symbolism in the art, architecture and literature of both China and North Korea is the proof of the importance of this cultural tie that had been able to overcome seven decades. The key to explain why nowadays North Korea and China are still allies lies not only in their political interest but also in their cultural ties, ties that, as we are often reminded, were sealed in blood since that far 1950 when China decided to enter a bloody war and sent its soldiers to fight together with their Korean brothers.

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