

**MAO'S CHINA AND
THE COLD WAR**



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Mao justified the CCP's decision
his most consistent and power-
deprive the Americans of a means

Washington's hostility toward the
comrades, the perceived American
is inferior made them angry. In the
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policy in 1949–50 had deep roots
experiences. Sharp divergences in
nationalism) and perceived national in-
Sino-American confrontation; and
as the result of Washington's
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the most profound reason under-
Mao's grand plans for transform-
outlook. Even though it might
the concrete course of its China
policy's complicated background),
United States to alter the course and
the historical-cultural environment
"change" in China must therefore



CHAPTER 3 MAO'S CONTINUOUS REVOLUTION AND THE RISE AND DEMISE OF THE SINO-SOVIET ALLIANCE, 1949–1963

*Fluttering high are the banners of victory,
shaking the earth and mountain is the singing of millions;
Mao Zedong–Stalin,
like the sun(s) shining in the heaven.
—“Song of Sino-Soviet Solidarity”*

*Never are there two suns in the heaven,
Never should there be two emperors on the earth.
—Age-old Chinese proverb*

No other event during the Cold War contributed more to changes in perceptions of the Communist powers than the rise and demise of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Emerging in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the “brotherly solidarity” between the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union was claimed to be “unbreakable” and “eternal.” But by the latter part of the decade, serious disputes began to develop between Chinese and Soviet leaders, causing the alliance to crumble and then, in the mid-1960s, to collapse. In the years that followed, the hostility between the two countries grew so intense that it led to a bloody border war in 1969.¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, the complete break in the two Communist giants’ alliance became a basic element of international affairs.

What, then, were the causes underlying the rise and demise of the Sino-Soviet alliance? Scholars may answer this question in many ways. This chapter adopts a domestic-politics-centered approach. Without ignoring the merits of other interpretations, especially those emphasizing the role played by China’s security concerns and international ideological commitments, this chapter argues that China’s alliance policy toward the Soviet Union was *always* an integral part of Mao Zedong’s grand continuous revolution plans designed to transform China’s state, society, and international outlook. While security

concerns and socialist internationalism conditioned the rise and fall of the alliance, it was Mao's efforts to define and redefine the mission and scope of his continuous revolution—which constituted the central theme of Chinese politics during his era (1949 to 1976)—that had shaped Beijing's attitude toward China's alliance with the Soviet Union.

The “Lean-to-One-Side” Approach

On 30 June 1949, Mao Zedong issued his famous “lean-to-one-side” statement. In a long article titled “On People's Democratic Dictatorship,” he announced Communist China's special relationship with the Soviet Union. He said that revolutionary China must “unite in a common struggle with those nations of the world that treat us as equal and unite with the peoples of all countries—that is, ally ourselves with the Soviet Union, with the People's Democratic Countries, and with the proletariat and the broad masses of the people in all other countries, and form an international united front. . . . We must lean to one side.”²

Why did Mao choose these extraordinary terms? The statement was obviously linked to the longtime revolutionary policy of the Chinese Communist Party of attaching itself to the international “progressive forces” led by the Soviet Union. By the late 1940s, CCP leaders clearly perceived the postwar world as divided into two camps, one headed by the Soviet Union and the other by the United States, and regarded their revolution as a part of the Soviet-led international proletarian movement.³ It is apparent that Mao's statement was consistent with this view of the postwar world structure.

The lean-to-one-side approach also grew out of the CCP's assessment of the serious nature of the threat from Western imperialist countries, especially from the United States, to the completion of the Chinese revolution. As the CCP neared final victory in China's civil war in 1949, Mao and his fellow Chinese Communist leaders became very much concerned about the prospect of direct U.S. intervention in China.⁴ Although the American military did not intervene directly during the latter phase of the civil war, the CCP chairman and his comrades, given their belief in the aggressive and evil nature of Western imperialism, continued to view the Western capitalist countries in general and the United States in particular as dangerous enemies.⁵ In the eyes of Mao and his comrades, “it was the possibility of military intervention from imperialist countries that made it necessary for China to ally itself with other socialist countries.”⁶

Mao's lean-to-one-side decision cannot be viewed in terms of these ideological commitments and security concerns only, though. It also must be un-

derstood in the context of his determination to maintain and enhance the inner dynamics of the Chinese Communist revolution at the time of its nationwide victory. The final goal of Mao's Chinese revolution, as the CCP chairman himself repeatedly emphasized, was the transformation of China's "old" state and society and the destruction of the "old" world in which, as Mao and his comrades viewed it, China had been a humiliated member during modern times. Mao never concealed his ambition that his revolution would finally turn China into a land of universal justice and equality, and that, simultaneously, through presenting the experience of the Chinese revolution as a model for other "oppressed nations" in the world, China would reestablish its central position in the international community.⁷

In 1949, when the Chinese Communist revolution approached nationwide victory, Mao and his comrades understood that the new China would have to meet such challenges as establishing and consolidating a new revolutionary regime and reviving China's war-worn economy. But what concerned the CCP chairman the most was how to prevent the revolution from losing its momentum. In his 1949 New Year's message, the CCP chairman called upon his party "to carry the revolution through to the end," by which he meant not only the thorough destruction of the Guomindang regime but also the promotion of the revolution toward its higher, post-takeover stage.⁸ Throughout 1949 Mao repeatedly warned against imperialist plots to sabotage the revolution from within either using the "sugar-coated bullet" to shoot down the weak-willed Communists or dividing the revolutionary camp by applying the "doctrine of means" to confuse the distinction between revolution and counterrevolution.⁹ He stressed that "after the destruction of the enemies with guns, the enemies without guns are still there, and they are bound to struggle desperately against us." The CCP chairman therefore warned his party: "If we fail to pay enough attention to these problems, if we do not know how to wage the struggle against them and win victory in the struggle, we shall be unable to maintain our political power, we shall be unable to stand on our feet, we shall fail."¹⁰

It was primarily for the purpose of creating new momentum for the Chinese revolution that the CCP leadership made three fundamental decisions on Communist China's external relations, what Zhou Enlai referred to as "making a fresh start," "cleaning the house before entertaining guests," and "leaning to one side."¹¹ These three decisions were closely interconnected. While the first two represented CCP leaders' determination not to be influenced by the legacy of "old" China's diplomatic practice, the last one reflected their conviction that an alliance with the Soviet Union would help destroy any remaining illu-

sions among the Chinese people, especially the intellectuals, of the utility of assistance from Western capitalist countries. Because the Soviet Union had been the first socialist country in the world and had established the only example for building a socialist state and society, Mao's continuous revolution had to follow the example of the Soviet experience. In this regard, the argument of Zhang Baijia, a leading Chinese scholar in Chinese diplomatic history, certainly makes good sense: "Contrary to the prevalent view, Mao treated the 'lean-to-one-side' concept as a grand strategy to influence the party's foreign *and* domestic policies. The key question Mao tried to answer by introducing the lean-to-one-side approach was how to define the *general* direction of New China's development."¹²

Not surprisingly, despite the tortuous development of the CCP-Soviet relations during the course of the Chinese revolution, Mao and the CCP leadership made genuine efforts to strengthen their relations with Moscow when the party was winning China's civil war. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, Anastas Mikoyan made a secret trip to Xibaipo in early 1949 and Liu Shaoqi met with Stalin in Moscow in the summer of 1949. The Chinese Communist efforts to achieve a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union culminated in December 1949–February 1950 when Mao personally visited the Soviet Union. The CCP chairman's experience during the visit, however, was uneasy. During his first meeting with Stalin on 16 December, the Soviet leader asked him what he hoped to achieve from the visit. The CCP chairman, according to his interpreter's recollections, first replied that he wanted to "bring about something that not only looked nice but also tasted delicious"—a reference to his wish to sign a new Sino-Soviet treaty.¹³ However, Stalin greatly disappointed Mao by initially emphasizing that it was neither in Moscow's nor in Beijing's interest to abolish the 1945 Sino-Soviet treaty the Soviet Union had signed with the GMD.¹⁴ Mao's visit then hit a deadlock for almost three weeks before the Soviets relented.¹⁵ Chinese premier Zhou Enlai arrived in Moscow on 20 January to negotiate the details of the new alliance treaty, which was signed finally on 14 February 1950. The Chinese, however, had to agree to allow the Soviets to maintain their privileges in China's Northeast and Xinjiang;¹⁶ in exchange, the Soviets agreed to increase military and other material support to China, including providing air-defense installations in coastal areas of the People's Republic.¹⁷

Mao must have had mixed feelings when he left Moscow to return to China. On the one hand, he had reasons to celebrate the signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty. The alliance would greatly enhance the PRC's security, and, more important, it would expand the CCP's capacity to promote the post-



Joseph Stalin (center) and Mao Zedong at the celebration rally for Stalin's seventieth birthday, Moscow, 21 December 1949. At the far left is Chinese interpreter Shi Zhe. Courtesy Shi Zhe personal collection.

victory revolution at home. With the backing of the Soviet Union, Mao and his comrades would occupy a more powerful position to wipe out the political, economic, social, and cultural legacies of the “old” China and carry out “new” China’s state-building and societal transformation on the CCP’s terms. It was not just rhetoric when the CCP chairman, after returning to Beijing, told his comrades that the Sino-Soviet alliance would help the party cope with both domestic and international threats to the Chinese revolution.¹⁸

On the other hand, however, Mao could clearly sense that divergences persisted between Stalin and himself. Stalin’s raw use of the language of power put off Mao. Mao’s wish to discuss revolutionary ideals and the Communists’ historical responsibilities came to nothing. The CCP chairman never enjoyed meeting Stalin face to face, and he was extremely sensitive to the way Stalin treated him, the revolutionary leader from the Central Kingdom, as the inferior “younger brother.”¹⁹ The Sino-Soviet treaty made the lean-to-one-side approach the cornerstone of China’s external relations, yet, because of the way the agreement was designed, the future development of Sino-Soviet relations was bound to be rocky.

The Alliance and China’s Korean War Experience

The first major test for the Sino-Soviet alliance came just eight months after it had been established, when, in October 1950, the CCP leadership de-

cided to dispatch Chinese troops to enter the Korean War. From Beijing's perspective, such a test not only allowed Mao and his comrades to define more specifically the alliance's utility for China's national security; it also provided them with a valuable opportunity to achieve a better understanding of how the alliance would serve Mao's revolutionary projects. China's Korean War experience, consequently, would profoundly influence both Mao's concerns about the prospect of the Chinese revolution and the future development of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

The Korean War, as revealed by new Russian and Chinese sources, was, first of all, North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's war, which he initiated on the basis of his judgment (or misjudgment) of the revolutionary situation existing on the Korean peninsula.²⁰ Stalin initially feared that such a war could result in direct military conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, and he did not endorse Kim's plans of unifying his country by military means. At the end of January 1950, however, U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson's statement indicating that Korea would be excluded from America's western Pacific defense perimeter appears to have convinced him that direct U.S. military intervention in the peninsula was unlikely.²¹ In the months prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the Soviet Union provided large amounts of military aid to the Korean Communists, but Stalin never made the commitment to use Soviet military forces in Korea, and he insisted that Kim travel to Beijing to consult with Mao Zedong, so that the Chinese Communists would share responsibility for Kim's war preparations.²²

Mao and the CCP leadership faced a dilemma on the Korean issue. Mao and his comrades were reluctant to see a war break out in Korea because they worried that that might complicate the situation in East Asia and jeopardize the CCP's effort to liberate Taiwan, which was still occupied by Nationalist forces.²³ Yet, because Mao and his comrades were eager to revive China's central position on the international scene through supporting revolutionary movements in other countries (especially in East Asia), and because profound historical connections existed between the Chinese and North Korean Communists, it would have been inconceivable for Mao to veto Kim's plans to unify his country through a revolutionary war.²⁴ From 1949 to 1950, in meetings with North Korean leaders (including Kim Il-sung in mid-May 1950), Mao made it clear that the CCP supported the Korean revolution but hoped that the Koreans would not initiate the invasion of the South until the PLA had seized Taiwan.²⁵ In the meantime, during Mao's 1949-50 visit to the Soviet Union, the CCP chairman shared with Stalin his belief that it was unlikely for the United States to involve itself in a revolutionary civil war in East Asia, thus enhancing Stalin's

determination to back Kim's plans to attack the South.²⁶ Furthermore, from summer 1949 to spring 1950, the Chinese sent 50,000 to 70,000 ethnic Korean PLA soldiers (with weapons) back to Korea.²⁷ As a result, Mao virtually gave Kim's plan a green light.

The Korean War erupted on 25 June 1950, and U.S. president Harry Truman promptly decided to come to the rescue of Syngman Rhee's South Korean regime and to dispatch the Seventh Fleet to "neutralize" the Taiwan Strait, a decision that turned the Korean War into an international crisis. Chinese leaders quickly decided to postpone the invasion of Taiwan and to focus on dealing with the crisis in Korea.²⁸ On 13 July the CCP leadership formally established the Northeast Border Defense Army (NEBDA), assigning it with the task of preparing for military intervention in Korea in the event that the war turned against North Korea.²⁹ On 18 August, after over a quarter million Chinese troops had taken up positions along the Chinese-Korean border, Mao set the end of September as the deadline for these troops to complete preparations for military operations in Korea.³⁰

Beijing based its handling of the Korean crisis on the assumption that if China entered the Korean War, the Soviet Union would honor its obligations in accordance with the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty and provide China with all kinds of support, including supplies of ammunition, military equipment, and air cover for Chinese land forces. Early in July, when the Chinese leaders informed Stalin of the decision to establish the NEBDA, Stalin supported the plan and promised that if the Chinese troops were to fight in Korea, the Soviet Union would "try to provide air cover for these units."³¹ In the following weeks the Soviets accelerated military deliveries to China, and a Soviet air force division, with 122 MiG-15 fighters, entered China's Northeast to help with air defense there.³² These developments must have enhanced Beijing's belief that if China entered the Korean War, the Soviets would provide them with substantial military support.

When the course of the war reversed after U.S. troops landed at Inchon on 15 September, however, Stalin's attitude regarding Soviet military assistance changed. He became more determined than ever to avoid a direct military confrontation with the United States. In a telegram to Chinese leaders dated 1 October, Stalin pointed out that the situation in Korea was grave and that without outside support, the Korean Communist regime would collapse. He then asked the Chinese to dispatch their troops to Korea. It is noticeable, however, that he did not mention what support the Soviet Union would offer China, let alone touch on the key question of Soviet air support.³³

At this moment, serious differences in opinions already existed among top

Chinese leaders on whether or not China should enter the war. Mao favored dispatching troops to Korea, and on 2 October he personally drafted a long telegram to respond to Stalin's request, informing Stalin that the Chinese leadership had decided "to send a portion of our troops, under the name of [Chinese People's] Volunteers, to Korea, assisting the Korean comrades to fight the troops of the United States and its running dog Syngman Rhee." Mao summarized the reasons for this decision, emphasizing that even though China's intervention might cause a war between China and the United States, it was necessary for the sake of the Korean and Eastern revolutions. Mao also made it clear that in order to defeat the American troops in Korea, China needed substantial Soviet military support.³⁴ He used plain language to ask Stalin to clarify "whether or not the Soviet Union can provide us with assistance in supplying weapons, can dispatch a volunteer air force into Korea, and can deploy large numbers of air force units to assist us in strengthening our air defense in Beijing, Tianjin, Shenyang, Shanghai, and Nanjing if the United States uses its air force to bombard these places."³⁵

Mao, however, apparently did not dispatch this telegram, probably because the opinions among top CCP leaders were yet to be unified and he also realized the need to bargain with Stalin on the Soviet air support issue.³⁶ According to Russian sources, Mao met with Nikolai Rochshin, the Soviet ambassador to China, later on 2 October, informing him that because dispatching Chinese troops to Korea "may entail extremely serious consequences," including "provoking an open conflict between the United States and China," many leaders in Beijing believed that China should "show caution" in entering the Korean War. Mao told Stalin that the Chinese leadership had not decided whether to send troops to Korea.³⁷

Over the ensuing two weeks, the Sino-Soviet alliance underwent a major test. Before 7 October (when Stalin informed Kim of Mao's communication), the Soviet leader cabled the Chinese leadership, advising Beijing that for the sake of China's security interests as well as the interests of the world proletarian revolution, it was necessary for China to send troops to Korea. Indeed, Stalin even introduced a thesis that may be called the Communist version of the domino theory, warning Mao and his comrades that Beijing's failure to intervene could result in grave consequences first for China's Northeast, then for all China, and then for the entire world revolution. Ironically, Stalin again failed to mention how the Soviet Union would support China if Chinese troops did enter operations in Korea.³⁸

By 7 October, Chinese leaders had already made the decision to enter the war. From 3 to 6 October the CCP leadership held a series of strictly secret

meetings to discuss the Korean issue. Although most CCP leaders had opposed, or at least had reservations about, entering the war in Korea, Mao used both his authority and his political insights to secure the support of his colleagues for the decision to go to war.³⁹ On 8 October Mao Zedong formally issued the order to establish the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV), with Peng Dehuai as the commander,⁴⁰ and informed Kim Il-sung of the decision the same evening.⁴¹

In order to strengthen China's bargaining position in pursuing Soviet military support, Mao found it necessary to "play tough with" Stalin.⁴² On 10–11 October, Zhou Enlai met with Stalin at the latter's villa on the Black Sea. Zhou, according to Shi Zhe, Mao's and Zhou's Russian-language interpreter, did not tell Stalin that China had decided to send troops to Korea but persistently brought the discussion around to Soviet military aid, especially air support, for China. Stalin finally agreed to provide China with substantial military support but explained that it was impossible for the Soviet air force to engage in fighting over Korea until two to two and a half months after Chinese land forces entered operations there.⁴³

Stalin's ambiguous attitude forced Mao again to order Chinese troops to halt preparations for entering operations in Korea on 12 October.⁴⁴ The next day the CCP politburo met again to discuss China's entry into the Korean War. Pushed by Mao, the politburo confirmed that entering the war was in the fundamental interests of the Chinese revolution as well as the Eastern revolution.⁴⁵ Mao then authorized Zhou Enlai, who was still in Moscow, to inform Stalin of the decision. At the same time, Mao instructed Zhou to continue to "consult with" the Soviet leaders, to clarify whether they would ask China to lease or to purchase the military equipment that Stalin agreed to provide, and whether the Soviet air force would enter operations in Korea at all.⁴⁶

On 17 October, the day Zhou returned to Beijing, Mao again ordered the troops on the Chinese-Korean border to halt their movements to give him time to learn from Zhou about Stalin's exact position.⁴⁷ The next day, when Mao was convinced that the Soviet Union would provide China with all kinds of military support, including air defense for major Chinese cities and air cover for Chinese troops fighting in Korea in a later stage of the war, he finally ordered Chinese troops to enter the Korean War.⁴⁸

The concerns over China's physical security certainly played an important role in convincing Beijing's leaders to enter the war. Yet factors more complicated than these narrowly defined "security concerns" dominated Mao's conceptual world. When Chinese troops entered the Korean War, Mao meant to pursue a glorious victory over the American-led United Nations (UN) forces.

The triumph, he hoped, would transform the challenge and threat posed by the Korean crisis into added political energy for securing Communist control of China's state and society as well as promote the international prestige and influence of the People's Republic.

These plans explain why, at the same time Mao and his comrades were considering entering the Korean War, the CCP leadership started the "Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea," with "beating American arrogance" as its central slogan. The party used every means available to stir the "hatred of the U.S. imperialists" among common Chinese, emphasizing that the United States had long engaged in political and economic aggression against China, that the declining capitalist America was not as powerful as it seemed, and that a confrontation between China and the United States was inevitable.⁴⁹ When the Chinese troops were crossing the Yalu River to Korea late in October 1950, a nationwide campaign aimed at suppressing "reactionaries and reactionary activities" emerged in China's cities and countryside.⁵⁰ All of these developments must be understood as part of Mao's efforts to mobilize the Chinese population to promote his grand programs for carrying on the Chinese revolution.

Mao's already ambivalent feelings toward Stalin must have been even more uncertain during the first three weeks of October. If Mao intended to use the Korean crisis as a new source of domestic political mobilization, it would follow that he would have welcomed Stalin's constant push for China to enter the war as well as his promise, however late, to provide China with ammunition, military equipment, and eventual air cover. In turn, Mao would be in a prime position to persuade the party leadership to approve his decision to enter the war. But Stalin's behavior of always putting Moscow's own interests ahead of anything else demonstrated to Mao the limits of the Soviet leader's proletarian internationalism. Meanwhile, Mao's decision to rescue the Korean and Eastern revolution at a time of real difficulties inevitably heightened the CCP chairman's sense of moral superiority—he was able to help others out, even if the Soviet "elder brother" could not. As a result, in conceptual and psychological terms, the seed for the future Sino-Soviet split was sown.

During the three years of China's intervention in Korea, the practical aspect of the relationship between Beijing and Moscow intensified. Mao consulted with Stalin on almost all important decisions. In December 1950 and January 1951, when Mao and his comrades were deciding to order Chinese troops to cross the 38th parallel, Beijing maintained daily communication with Moscow and received Stalin's unfailing support.⁵¹ In May–June 1951, when Beijing's leaders were considering shifting their policy emphasis from fighting to nego-

tiation to end the war, they had extensive exchanges of opinions with Stalin and did not make the decision until Moscow fully backed the new strategy.⁵² After 1952, when the armistice negotiations at Panmunjom hit a deadlock on the prisoner-of-war issue, Beijing consulted with Moscow and concluded that the Chinese/North Korean side would not compromise on this issue until its political and military position had improved.⁵³

As far as the foundation of the Sino-Soviet alliance was concerned, Mao's decision to send Chinese troops to Korea seemed to have boosted Stalin's confidence in his comrades in Beijing as genuine proletarian internationalists. During the war years, the Soviet Union provided China with large amounts of ammunition and military equipment. Units of the Soviet air force, based in Manchuria, began to defend the transportation lines across the Chinese-Korean border as early as November 1950 and entered operations over the northern part of North Korea in January 1951.⁵⁴ In the meantime, Stalin became more willing to commit Soviet financial and technological resources to China's economic reconstruction—during the war years, as a consequence, the Soviet Union's share in China's foreign trade increased from 30 percent (in 1950) to 56.3 percent (in 1953).⁵⁵ In retrospect, it would have been virtually impossible for China to have fought the Korean War without the strategic alliance with the Soviet Union.

Soviet support also played a crucial role in bolstering Mao's plans for continuing the revolution at home. Indeed, China's involvement in the Korean War stimulated a series of political and social transformations in the country that would have been inconceivable during the early stage of the new republic. In the wake of China's entrance into the war, the Communist regime found itself in a powerful position to penetrate almost every area of Chinese society through intensive mass mobilization under the banner of "Resisting America and Assisting Korea."⁵⁶ During the three years of war, three nationwide campaigns swept through China's countryside and cities: the movement to suppress counterrevolutionaries, the land reform movement, and the "Three Antis" and "Five Antis" movements.⁵⁷ When the war ended in July 1953, China's society and political landscape had been altered: organized resistance to the new regime had been destroyed; land in the countryside had been redistributed and the landlord class had been eliminated; many of the Communist cadres whom Mao believed had lost the revolutionary momentum had been either "reeducated" or removed from leading positions; and the national bourgeoisie was under the tight control of the Communist state and the "petit-bourgeoisie" intellectuals had experienced the first round of Communist reeducation. Consequently, the CCP effectively extended and deepened

its organizational control of Chinese society and dramatically promoted its authority and legitimacy in the minds of the Chinese people.

These domestic changes were further facilitated by the fact that during the war, Chinese troops successfully forced the U.S./UN forces to retreat from the Chinese-Korean border to the 38th parallel, a development that allowed Beijing to call its intervention in Korea a great victory. Mao and his comrades believed that they had won a powerful position from which to claim that international society—friends and foes alike—had to accept China as a Great Power.⁵⁸ This position, in turn, would allow Mao, as the mastermind of the war decision, to enjoy political power inside China with far fewer checks and balances than before. His view of China's international victory in Korea made him more confident and enthusiastic to undertake a series of new steps to transform China. Mao had good reason to be thankful for the Sino-Soviet alliance during the Korean crisis.

Yet, on another level, the Chinese experience during the Korean War also ground away at some of the cement that kept the Sino-Soviet alliance together. The extreme pragmatism Stalin had demonstrated in his management of the Korean crisis, especially in his failure to commit Soviet air support to China during the key weeks of October 1950, revealed the superficial nature of the Soviet dictator's proletarian internationalism. What really offended Mao and his comrades, however, was the Soviet request that China pay for much of the military support Beijing had received during the war, which added to China's long-term economic challenges.⁵⁹ To the Chinese, Stalin's stinginess made the Soviets seem more like arms merchants than genuine Communist internationalists.

Consequently, although China's Korean War experience made Beijing more dependent on Moscow, psychologically Stalin's attitude bolstered Mao's and his fellow Chinese leaders' sense of moral superiority in relation to their Soviet comrades. Stalin's death in March 1953 further hardened this feeling. As will be discussed later, this subtle change in Mao's and his comrades' perception of themselves and their comrades in Moscow would leave a critical stamp upon the fate of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

The Alliance's Golden Years

For a period of several years immediately after Stalin's death, Sino-Soviet cooperation developed smoothly. The Soviets offered the Chinese substantial support to assist the PRC's economic reconstruction, as well as to promote its international status. From 29 September to 12 October 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

(CPSU), led a top-level Soviet delegation to visit China to participate in the PRC's fifth anniversary celebrations. During this visit, the Soviets signed a series of agreements with the Chinese. They agreed to return to China Soviet military bases in Lüshun (Port Arthur), together with its equipment, to give up Soviet shares in four Sino-Soviet joint ventures,⁶⁰ and to provide China with loans totaling 520 million rubles. In addition, they offered technological support to China in initiating or upgrading 156 key industrial projects for the PRC's first five-year plan.⁶¹ In April 1955 the Soviet Union and China signed an agreement under which Moscow provided Beijing with nuclear technology, purportedly for peaceful purposes.⁶² It appeared that Khrushchev and the new Soviet leadership were willing to establish a more productive and cooperative relationship with their Chinese comrades.⁶³

Chinese leaders in Beijing also demonstrated solidarity with Khrushchev and the new Soviet leadership on a number of important domestic and international issues. When the Soviet leaders made the decision to purge Lavrenty Beria, Stalin's chief of the secret police, and when Khrushchev became the CPSU's first secretary, the CCP leadership quickly offered its approval. In the meantime, on pivotal Soviet foreign policy decisions such as the formation of the Warsaw Pact Organization, the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and West Germany, the signing of a peace treaty with Austria, and the improvement of relations with Yugoslavia, Beijing provided Moscow with timely and firm support.⁶⁴

On important international issues, Chinese and Soviet leaders carefully consulted with each other to coordinate their strategies and policies. A revealing example in this regard was Beijing's and Moscow's management of the Geneva Conference of 1954. Before the conference, Zhou Enlai twice visited Moscow to hold a series of meetings with Soviet leaders, which resulted in well-coordinated Sino-Soviet strategies toward the Korean and the Indochina questions that were to be discussed at the conference.⁶⁵ At Geneva, the Chinese and the Soviet delegations exchanged opinions and intelligence information on a daily basis. When the Vietnamese Communists hesitated before accepting the temporary division of their country along the 17th parallel, both the Chinese and the Soviets pressured the Vietnamese, convincing them that such a solution was in the interests of both the Vietnamese revolution and the cause of world peace. In this sense it is fair to say that the conference's settlement of the Indochina issue should be attributed to the cooperation between Zhou Enlai and Vyacheslav Molotov.⁶⁶ The 1954-55 period shined as a golden age of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

The continuous enhancement of the alliance during this period reflected,

to some degree, Moscow's and Beijing's coinciding strategic concerns. From a Soviet perspective, these were the years that Khrushchev and his colleagues slowly began to rid themselves of Stalin's shadow. Khrushchev, who had just emerged as the top Soviet leader and needed time to consolidate his leadership role, certainly understood that the support from China was indispensable to him.⁶⁷

Beijing, on the other hand, also needed Moscow's assistance. The CCP leadership was adjusting China's internal and external policies after the end of the Korean War. Domestically, in 1953–54 the Central Committee was contemplating the introduction of the first five-year plan as well as liberating the Nationalist-controlled Taiwan either by peaceful or, if necessary, by military means.⁶⁸ After five years of being excluded from the international community, Beijing's leaders (including Mao at that time) were eager to escape China's isolation.⁶⁹ Under these circumstances, especially considering that China's socialist reconstruction had to be modeled after the Soviet example, political, military, and economic support from the Soviet Union became highly valuable. In other words, the specific needs of Mao's continuous revolution at this stage were well served by the Sino-Soviet alliance.

A vague undercurrent of disagreement and distrust, however, lingered between Chinese and Soviet leaders. Even during the heyday of Sino-Soviet solidarity, Mao and his comrades were never comfortable with the junior partner's role they had to play in China's relations with the Soviet Union. As they would explain later, Mao and his comrades felt a deep sense of inequality in their dealings with the Soviets, and particularly with Stalin. Making Beijing a real equal partner with Moscow was the constant aim of Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders.⁷⁰ After Stalin's death, as we shall see, Beijing's pursuit of an elusive "equality" would eventually cause friction with the new Soviet leadership.⁷¹

Related to the Chinese discomfort over "inequality" were the potential tensions between Moscow's dominance in the international Communist movement and Beijing's aspiration for recognition as a central part of the "world revolution." Such international recognition would, among other things, further legitimate Mao's plans for bringing the Chinese revolution to deeper levels. When Stalin was alive, Mao and his comrades had to respect his authority and yield to his reputation; with Stalin gone, Mao became increasingly reluctant to acknowledge the authority of Stalin's much younger and, in Mao's eyes, less sophisticated successor, Nikita Khrushchev.

One outstanding example of the problems existing between Beijing and Moscow during this time can be found in Mao's management of the Gao Gang affair. Gao was a CCP politburo member and the vice chairman of the PRC Cen-

tral People's Government. Mao and other politburo members believed Gao had been a close friend of Moscow since his days as the CCP leader in the Northeast. Beginning in December 1953, Gao became the target of a series of escalating attacks from the CCP leadership. He was labeled as a "conspirator who intended to split the party" and removed from his position. He was reported to have committed suicide in August 1954.⁷²

It is now believed that Gao Gang's purge was the result of a long-standing conflict between him and other top CCP leaders, especially Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai, and probably was not directly related to his presumed close ties with the Soviets. However, the timing of the purge was important and revealing. Although the tensions between Gao Gang and Liu Shaoqi had existed for years, Mao did not decide to take Liu's side to criticize Gao until after Stalin's death. Despite Gao's close relations with the Soviets, the CCP did not keep Moscow abreast of what was happening to him. Gao died two weeks before Mao informed the Soviet leaders officially that Gao had committed "serious crimes in trying to split the party" on 1 September 1954.⁷³ Ignoring Moscow's "right to know"—if not "right to lead"—in this way would have been inconceivable if Stalin had been alive, or if genuine trust had existed between the Chinese and Soviet leaders.

Accumulated Tension

A turning point came in February 1956, when the CPSU held its Twentieth Congress. Toward the end of the meeting, Khrushchev delivered a lengthy speech criticizing Stalin and his personality cult at a secret session, to which the CCP delegation to the congress had not been invited. The Soviets did provide the Chinese delegation with a copy of Khrushchev's speech afterward,⁷⁴ but the fact that they failed to consult Beijing in advance greatly offended Mao and his fellow CCP leaders.⁷⁵

Khrushchev's speech shocked Mao and the CCP leadership. From mid-March to early April 1956, top CCP leaders held a series of meetings to discuss Khrushchev's speech and formulate strategies to deal with the situation it created.⁷⁶ At the first of such meetings, convened on the evening of 17 March, Mao set the tone for the discussion, pointing out that Khrushchev's speech not only "exposed the problems" (*jie le gaizi*) in Stalin's Soviet Union but also "made a mess" (*tong le louzi*).⁷⁷

Mao and his comrades believed that Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin's mistakes had shattered the myth that Stalin and the Soviet Union had always been correct and would thus contribute to "correcting Stalin's mistakes as well as the erroneous tendency of treating other parties as inferiors within the interna-