

when the great Sino-Soviet polemic debate escalated in highly emotional and confrontational language, the alliance between Beijing and Moscow had virtually died. On several occasions, Mao even mentioned that China now had to consider the Soviet Union, which represented an increasingly serious threat to China's northern borders, as a potential enemy.¹⁶³ Even Khrushchev's fall from power in October 1964 could not reverse the trend of deteriorating relations. In November 1964, Beijing sent a delegation headed by Zhou Enlai to Moscow to discuss with the new Soviet leadership the prospect of stopping the Sino-Soviet polemic debates and improving Sino-Soviet relations. Zhou's visit, however, completely failed in reaching these goals, especially after Soviet defense minister Malinovskii reportedly asked the Chinese to take action to overthrow Mao Zedong as the CCP's top leader.¹⁶⁴

In 1965–66, the rhetoric centering on preventing a Soviet-style “capitalist restoration” from happening in China played an essential role in legitimizing Mao's efforts to bring the whole Chinese party, state, and population into the orbit of the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” When the Cultural Revolution officially began in summer 1966, the CCP chairman linked his widespread domestic purges to the “antirevisionist” and “anti-social imperialist” struggles on the international scene, labeling Liu Shaoqi, the major target of his purge during the Cultural Revolution, “China's Khrushchev.” Consequently, until the last days of his life, Mao made the rhetoric of antirevisionism (and, after the Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969, anti-social imperialism) central to mobilizing the Chinese people to sustain his continuous revolution. The Soviet Union, accordingly, became China's worst enemy throughout the 1970s. Not until the mid- and late 1980s, when Mao's continuous revolution had long been abandoned in China and Deng Xiaoping's “reform and opening” policies had dominated Chinese politics, would Beijing and Moscow move toward normal state relations.



CHAPTER 4 CHINA'S STRATEGIES TO END THE KOREAN WAR, 1950–1953

Resist America! Assist Korea!

Defend our nation! Defend our home!

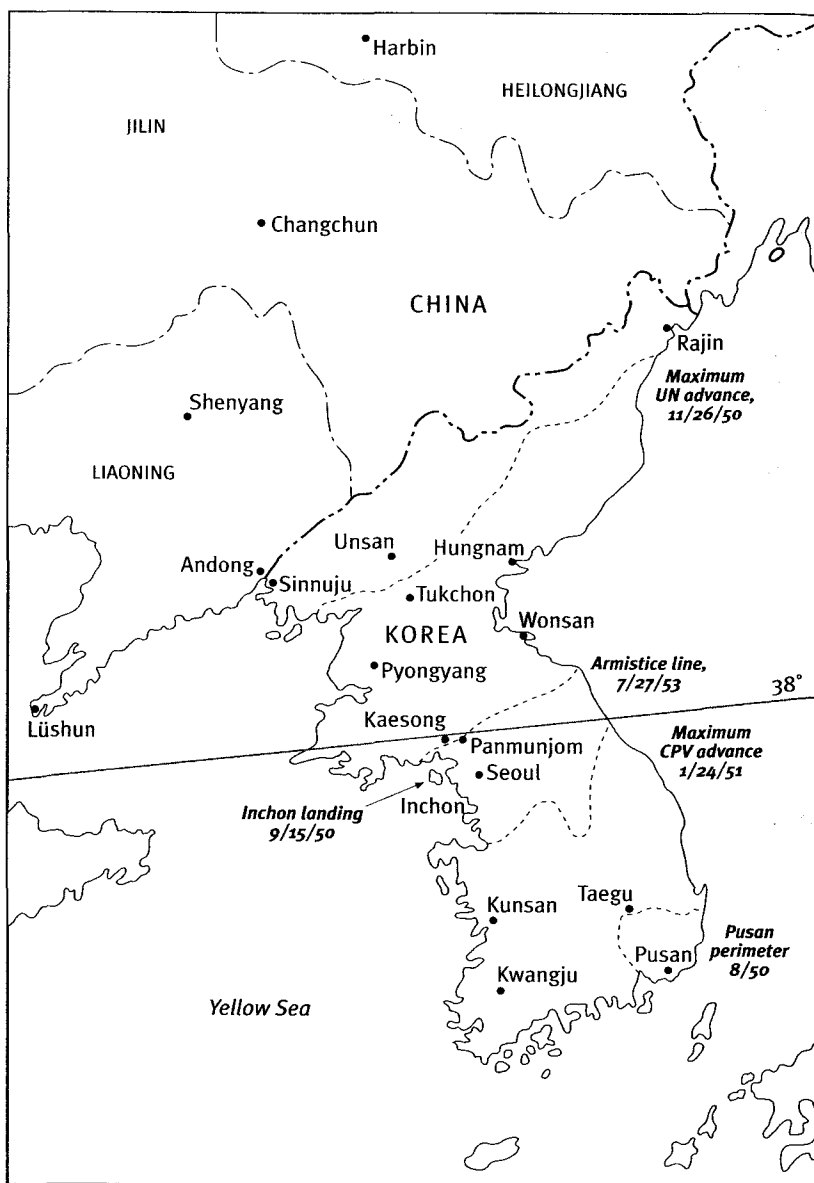
Beat American Arrogance!

—Chinese slogans during the Korean War

When China entered the Korean War in October 1950, Mao Zedong and the Beijing leadership intended to win a glorious victory by driving the Americans out of Korea.¹ Nine months later the cruel reality of the battlefield forced the Beijing leadership to adjust this goal. On 10 July 1951, negotiations to end the Korean conflict began at Kaeson. Although neither Chinese nor American combat forces subsequently demonstrated an ability to overwhelm the other side and, in reality, the military lines between the two sides never changed significantly, fighting would not end until July 1953.

Military conflict, as Karl von Clausewitz puts it, is the continuation of politics by other means. In this sense, how the Korean War ended is as important as how it began. However, because of the political sensitivity involved in the origins of the Korean War, scholars, as well as the general public, have devoted much of their attention to the war's beginning rather than to its end. Scholars who do realize the importance of the war's conclusion have long encountered another obstacle: the lack of reliable sources for exploring the Communist side of the story. While plausible studies about U.S./UN strategies to end the war do exist,² our knowledge of the Chinese Communists' handling of negotiations leading to an armistice remains in short supply.³

This chapter offers a critical review of the changing Chinese Communist strategies to end the Korean War. It first analyzes the implications of the Korean crisis for Beijing and the perceptions pertinent to and the goals pursued in Beijing's management of the war. It then presents a discussion of



KOREA AND CHINA'S NORTHEAST

how Beijing's aims in Korea changed during the process of its intervention and, accordingly, how the strategies designed to serve these aims had to be adjusted and readjusted. The central assumption is that three related factors shaped Beijing's perceptions and management of the changing course of the Korean crisis: the Chinese Communist leaders' overall domestic and international concerns, the Communist versus the U.S.'s/UN's strategies to end the war, and Beijing's perceptions of its needs and those of Moscow and Pyongyang in Korea.

Implications of the Korean Crisis in Beijing's Eyes

The eruption of the Korean War on 25 June 1950 did not take Beijing's leaders by surprise, but Washington's decision to intervene not only in Korea but also in Taiwan did.⁴ The Korean crisis presented to Beijing a series of challenges as well as opportunities. On the one hand, the Korean crisis threatened Beijing's key interests in several ways: it presented potential threats to China's physical security, especially the safety of China's industrial bases in the Northeast; it called into question the correctness of Beijing's overall perception that East Asia represented "the weak link of the chain of international imperialism," an opinion CCP leaders had held since 1946-47; it changed the scenario of the CCP-Nationalist confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, forcing Beijing's leaders to postpone and, finally, to call off the military campaign to "liberate Taiwan";⁵ it darkened the prospects for an ongoing East Asian revolution, which, in Beijing's view, should follow the model of the Chinese revolution; and, last but not least, it created tremendous internal pressures on Mao and the CCP leadership as the rulers of the newly established People's Republic of China.⁶

On the other hand, the Korean crisis offered the CCP leadership potential opportunities. In evaluating how the Korean crisis might influence China, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders could clearly sense that by firmly and successfully confronting the "U.S. imperialist aggression" in Korea and Taiwan, they would be able to translate the tremendous pressure from without into dynamics that would help enhance the Chinese people's revolutionary momentum while legitimizing the CCP's authority as China's new ruler. This would help establish the foundation for Mao's grand plans to transform China's old state and society into a new socialist country.⁷ And, although the Korean crisis challenged the international structure in the Asian-Pacific region, one of the main objectives of Communist China's foreign policy was to pound at the Western-dominated existing international order, and Beijing's leaders realized that a North Korean victory (preferably, with China's support) could help establish

a new order in East Asia. From Beijing's perspective, even an expansion of the conflict in Korea, certainly not desirable, might not be intolerable.⁸ The relationship between the CCP and the North Korean Communists had been complex. Kim Il-sung, while endeavoring to maintain cooperation with his Chinese comrades, was vigilant against Chinese influence.⁹ To Mao and the CCP leadership, expanding warfare in Korea would inevitably menace China's national security interests, but, at the same time, it could offer the Chinese Communists a possible opportunity to expand the influence of the Chinese revolution into an area at the top of the CCP's Asian revolutionary agenda.¹⁰ From the beginning, Mao and the CCP leadership viewed the Korean War with mixed feelings: failure to eject the Americans from Korea would create insecurity for China; success in defeating the Americans, especially with China's help, would advance revolutionary China's domestic mobilization and international reputation and influence.

Setting the Stage for Entering the War

By early July, Beijing's leaders had decided to postpone the plans for a Taiwan campaign to focus on Korea.¹¹ Preparing for a "worst-case scenario," Beijing created the Northeast Border Defense Army in mid-July, and, by early August, more than 260,000 Chinese troops had taken position along the Chinese-Korean border.¹² On 18 August, after a series of deliberations and adjustments, Mao Zedong established the end of September as the deadline for NEBDA to complete preparations for commencing operations in Korea.¹³ On the home front, the Beijing leadership started the "Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea," with "beating American arrogance" as its central slogan.¹⁴ Beijing's leaders used every means available to stir the "hatred of the U.S. imperialists" among common Chinese. They particularly emphasized that the United States had long engaged in political and economic aggressions against China, that the declining capitalist America was not as powerful as it seemed to be, and that a confrontation between China and the United States was inevitable.¹⁵ At the same time, the Beijing leadership decided to promote a nationwide campaign aimed at suppressing "reactionaries and reactionary activities." The campaign would reach its climax a few months later, shortly before the Chinese troops were entering the Korean War.¹⁶ All of these developments indicate that the Beijing leadership's management of the Korean crisis was comprehensive by nature. In the eyes of Mao and his fellow CCP leaders, Communist China's security interests would be best served by guaranteeing the safety of the Chinese-Korean border, enhancing the CCP's authority

and credibility at home, and promoting the new China's prestige on the international scene. Beijing's leaders were determined to achieve all of these goals.

Within this context, on 12 July, Zhou Enlai personally drafted five conditions for a "peaceful settlement" of the Korean crisis: that all foreign troops withdraw from Korea; that U.S. military forces withdraw from the Taiwan Strait; that the Korean issue be solved by the Korean people themselves; that Beijing take over China's seat in the UN and Taipei be expelled; and that an international conference be called to discuss the signing of a peace treaty with Japan.¹⁷ Beijing would announce these conditions on several occasions in the following two months.

The introduction of these conditions revealed a fundamental tendency in Beijing's perception of the Korean crisis: since, in Beijing's view, the crisis was much broader than the Korean conflict itself, its settlement should include such issues as the Taiwan question and the PRC's seat at the UN.¹⁸ However, until the Inchon landing, the central Communist actors in Korea were Pyongyang and, to a lesser extent, Moscow. Kim Il-sung, as a Korean nationalist, was unwilling to allow Chinese interference as long as he believed the situation was under control.¹⁹ Stalin, on the other hand, assigned top priority to avoiding a direct confrontation with the United States and thus maintained a "wait-and-see" approach. Under these circumstances, Beijing's conditions to end the war served as a means to justify its comprehensive military preparation and political mobilization rather than as a specific strategy designed to settle the war.

After Inchon: Defining China's War Aims and Making the Decision on Intervention

The successful American landing at Inchon on 15 September 1950 changed the entire course of the Korean War. With the gradual collapse of the North Korean resistance and the northward march of UN forces, Mao and his comrades had to decide whether or not China should enter the Korean War.

Beijing made the decision to send troops to Korea in the first three weeks of October.²⁰ The process leading to the decision was complex. Top Chinese leaders were under intense pressure because of cruel domestic and international conditions, and the party leadership was divided on the necessity of entering the fighting.²¹ Further, although Stalin pushed the Chinese to enter the war "to give our Korean comrades an opportunity to organize combat reserves under the cover of your troops," he failed to clarify what military support Moscow would give Beijing if the Chinese did send troops to Korea.²²

Under these circumstances, members of the CCP Central Secretariat met on 2 October to discuss the Korean crisis and made the preliminary decision to send Chinese troops to Korea.²³ Mao then personally drafted a telegram to Stalin to inform the Soviet leader that Beijing had decided "to send a portion of our troops" to Korea and to request major Soviet air support.²⁴ However, because top CCP leaders were yet to reach a consensus on intervention and Mao hoped to strengthen China's bargaining position in getting Soviet air support, he probably did not dispatch this telegram.²⁵ Instead, he met with Soviet ambassador N. V. Rochshin, asking him to inform Stalin that, since many leaders in Beijing believed that China should "show caution" in entering the war, the CCP leadership had not made the decision to send troops to Korea.²⁶

But Mao's heart was with intervention. Although the majority of the party leaders hesitated to endorse sending troops to Korea when the politburo met to discuss the matter, Mao used both his political wisdom and authority to push his colleagues to support the war decision.²⁷ On 8 October, he issued the formal order to enter the war.²⁸ But he had to postpone the deadline for Chinese troops to enter Korea twice, respectively on 12 and 17 October,²⁹ when Stalin indicated that "it will take at least two to two and a half months for the Soviet air force to be ready to support the Chinese Volunteers' operations in Korea."³⁰ As historian Michael Hunt argues, "any effort to pin down the exact motive behind Mao's decision to intervene must enter a mind as complicated as the crisis it wrestled with."³¹

Yet how Mao came to decide to enter the war is clear. From the very beginning, Mao was inclined to enter the war, and he played a central role at every crucial juncture in formulating Beijing's war decision. At the 2 October Central Secretariat meeting, Mao made it clear that China had to enter the war, and he urged top CCP leaders to make the preliminary decision.³² At the politburo meetings that followed, Mao applied both his authority and political wisdom to secure top party leaders' support for the war decision.³³ Finally, when Moscow reneged on supplying Soviet air support in Korea, Mao convinced his comrades that sending troops to Korea was China's only option.³⁴

Mao justified his decision by reemphasizing that it was in China's fundamental interests to pursue a victory over the United States in Korea. In his correspondences with Stalin and his speeches to the CCP leadership, the chairman stated that the Chinese troops should enter the war to "resolve the Korean problem," that is, to "eliminate the invaders from the United States and from other countries, and [thus] drive them out [of Korea]." He linked the "settlement of the Korean problem" with China and the "whole East," emphasizing that China's entry into the war would strengthen the CCP's control of China's

state and society and serve to promote an Eastern revolution following the Chinese model.³⁵

However, Mao's ambition of winning a glorious victory over the United States was from the beginning bound by the means at his disposal, especially in light of Stalin's failure to commit Soviet air forces to cover China's war operations in Korea.³⁶ Nevertheless, the CCP leadership, under Mao's pressure, relented, and Chinese troops were to take the defensive during their first six months on the Korean battlefield.³⁷ On 19 October, a quarter million Chinese troops began entering Korea.

Refusing to Negotiate: The Pursuit of a Total Victory

The UN forces' rapid march toward the Chinese-Korean border in the weeks of late October and November 1950 placed more pressure on the Chinese while offering them new opportunities. With Mao's approval, Peng Dehuai, the commander in chief of the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea, adopted a strategy of inducing the enemy to march forward and then eliminating them by superior forces striking from their rear and on their flanks. On 25 October, the CPV initiated its first campaign in Korea in the Unsan area, forcing UN troops to retreat to the Chongchun River from areas close to the Yalu.³⁸

Chinese appearance on the Korean battlefield should have sent a strong warning to UN forces, but General Douglas MacArthur did not pay heed to it. In mid-November, he initiated a new "end the war" offensive. Peng ordered all Chinese units to retreat for about thirty kilometers, to occupy favorable positions, and to wait for the best opportunity to eliminate the enemy.³⁹ In late November, advancing UN forces entered areas where Chinese troops had laid their trap. Starting on 25 November, Chinese troops began a vigorous counteroffensive. By mid-December, the Chinese and North Korean troops had regained control of nearly all North Korean territory.

The Chinese military victory in Korea put Beijing's leaders in a favorable position to conclude the war through negotiations, if they so desired. On 5 December, thirteen non-Western countries headed by India handed a peace proposal to Beijing. They suggested that the Chinese stop their offensive at the 38th parallel and that, on the basis of a cease-fire, a meeting of the big powers with interests in Korea would be convened to discuss the final solution of the crisis.⁴⁰ Nine days later, the UN passed the thirteen-nation resolution and established a three-person group to seek a "basis on which a satisfactory ceasefire in Korea could be arranged."⁴¹ In order to persuade Beijing that a cease-fire was in its interests, the Indians repeatedly promised the Chinese that

the thirteen-country proposal did not originate in the West, and that in exchange for Beijing's acceptance of a cease-fire, other Chinese interests would be taken into account.⁴²

Beijing's leaders, however, were unwilling to accept anything short of a total victory, and for this they gained Moscow's full support.⁴³ On 8 December, Chen Jiakang, a high-ranking Chinese foreign ministry official, asked the Indians why the thirteen countries had failed to propose a cease-fire when the U.S./UN forces crossed the 38th parallel, and why they called for a cease-fire at a time when the Chinese/North Korean forces were advancing. Three days later, in a meeting with K. M. Panikkar, Indian ambassador to China, Zhou Enlai emphasized that since the 38th parallel had been crossed by the Americans, there was no need for the Chinese to respect it.⁴⁴

Chinese field commanders, and especially Peng Dehuai, had reservations about Chinese troops' continued offensive operations. They understood that the Chinese troops, although having achieved initial success against the UN forces, were vulnerable as the result of a weak logistical system and lack of air support. Peng therefore believed that the Chinese should discontinue the advance until reinforcements arrived from China.⁴⁵

However, Mao, in light of the glorious achievements of the first two Chinese campaigns in Korea, believed that the original goal of "eliminating the enemy troops and forcing the Americans out of Korea" should be maintained. The CCP chairman pointed out on 4 December that the Chinese victory in the first two campaigns had tipped the balance in Beijing's favor. Under Chinese pressure, the chairman speculated, the Americans might ask for a cease-fire. And if they did, he would demand that they promise to withdraw from Korea and, as the first step toward a cease-fire, that U.S. forces retreat to areas south of the 38th parallel.⁴⁶ He refused to consider any proposal about ending the Korean conflict through negotiation before the Chinese won a more decisive victory over the enemy, arguing that "it will be most unfavorable in political terms if [our forces] reach the 38th parallel and stop north of it."⁴⁷ On 21 December, he ordered Peng "to fight another campaign" and "to cross the 38th parallel."⁴⁸ The next day, Zhou Enlai formally rejected the thirteen-nation cease-fire resolution, condemning it as a U.S. plot to gain time for resuming the military offensive in Korea.⁴⁹

On the last day of 1950, Chinese troops began a third offensive campaign, and UN forces continued to retreat. Seoul fell to Chinese and North Korean troops on 4 January 1951. By 8 January, advance Chinese/North Korean units had reached the 37th parallel. Peng reported to Beijing that the third Chinese offensive campaign in Korea was victorious.⁵⁰

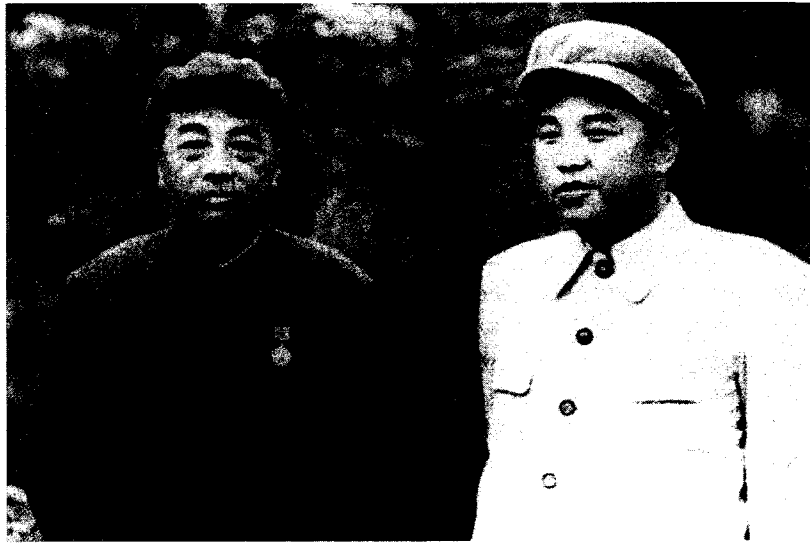
On 11 January, the UN's three-person cease-fire group suggested five principles for resolving the Korean conflict, among which the most important were an immediate cease-fire in Korea, the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea, and a meeting of the four powers (the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, and China) to settle outstanding Far East problems, and at which both the Taiwan issue and the PRC's representation in the UN would be discussed.⁵¹

In retrospect, this resolution might have offered Beijing a golden opportunity to end the war. Although the Chinese/North Korean gains in the third campaign were impressive, their offensive potentials had been almost exhausted as a result of their overextended supply lines, lack of air support, and heavy casualties. Worrying that further advance by Chinese/North Korean forces would expose their flanks to the enemy's attacks, Peng ordered them to stop offensive operations and focus on consolidating their gains.⁵² An immediate cease-fire would have allowed the Communists to hold their place and would have offered them a valuable break to rebuild their offensive momentum in the event that the cease-fire failed.⁵³

From the United States' perspective, the Communist acceptance of this resolution certainly would have placed Washington in a diplomatic dilemma. As Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated later, Washington faced a difficult choice: supporting the thirteen-country resolution could result in "the loss of the Koreans and the fury of Congress and the press"; failing to support it could lead to "the loss of our majority and support in the United Nations." Acheson confessed that the decision to support the proposal was largely based on the hope that China would reject it.⁵⁴

Beijing indeed decided to reject this proposal. On 17 January, Zhou Enlai, arguing that the resolution was "designed to give the American troops breathing space" in Korea, introduced Beijing's own terms for negotiations. He called for a seven-power meeting to be held in China, for the PRC to seize immediately China's seat in the UN, and for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea and Taiwan.⁵⁵ These terms made ending the war through negotiations impossible for the moment.

Underlying Beijing's inflexible attitude were several crucial assumptions. First of all, Mao believed that the Chinese/North Korean troops still held the upper hand on the battlefield. Although Peng and other Chinese field commanders in Korea found it difficult for their troops to advance farther south, Mao had a different view. Basing his observations of the Korean conflict on his experience in China's civil war, the CCP chairman believed that the Chinese troops, by outnumbering the enemy forces and maintaining higher morale,



Chinese People's Volunteers commander Peng Dehuai (left) and North Korean Communist leader Kim Il-sung at CPV headquarters, 1951. Xinhua News Agency.

could expand their gains. In a telegram to Peng on 14 January, Mao wrote of the two possibilities he foresaw in the future movement of U.S./UN forces in Korea: "(1) Under pressures from the great Chinese-Korean forces, [the enemy] may retreat from South Korea after a symbolic resistance. . . . (2) The enemy may resist stubbornly in Taegu and Pusan but will finally retreat from Korea after we have exhausted their potential."⁵⁶

The need to maintain solidarity with the North Koreans served as another reason for Beijing's inflexibility. The North Korean leaders, including Kim Il-sung and Pak Hon-yong, hoped to unify all of Korea and were not convinced by Peng's argument that the Chinese/North Korean forces were unable to continue the offensive.⁵⁷ They complained about Peng to both Stalin and Mao.⁵⁸ On 10 and 11 January, Peng Dehuai, "following Kim Il-sung's suggestion," met with Kim Il-sung and Pak Hon-yong. Although Peng repeatedly emphasized the extreme difficulties Chinese troops in Korea had been facing at that time, he could not persuade his North Korean comrades. Pak Hon-yong, whose main power base had been in South Korea, angrily argued that the Chinese/North Korean forces should continue to march southward.⁵⁹

Top Chinese leaders in Beijing, realizing the necessity of coordinating Beijing's position with North Korea's, sent two telegrams to Kim Il-sung on 14 January to clarify Beijing's official stand and to explain Chinese military

strategy in Korea. In a highly publicized memo, sent in the name of the Chinese government, Beijing emphasized that an immediate cease-fire was unacceptable for the Communist side. Only when the U.S./UN side had agreed to such important conditions as withdrawing all foreign troops from Korea, settling the Taiwan question, and addressing other important Far Eastern issues would Beijing agree to negotiate.⁶⁰ In another telegram sent to Kim Il-sung via Peng Dehuai, the CCP chairman pointed out that the Chinese forces "must be well prepared" before they could be put into another offensive campaign, otherwise they would "recommit the mistakes the Korean troops had committed in June-September 1950."⁶¹ The North Koreans now had to yield to the Chinese position, and they gave their consent when Kim Il-sung met with Peng Dehuai on 16-18 January.⁶² The next day, Mao instructed the CPV commanders in Korea to demonstrate "a whole-hearted respect" for the North Korean people, government, party, and, particularly, "the Korean people's leader, Comrade Kim Il-sung."⁶³ On 17 January, Zhou Enlai rejected the three-person group's ceasefire proposal.

In a deeper sense, Mao's pursuit of a total victory in Korea must be understood in the context of his desire to use the victory to push forward the political mobilization of the Chinese people on the CCP's terms. China's entry into the Korean War, as Mao had expected, triggered a new wave of patriotism and revolutionary nationalism among the Chinese people. The propaganda related to "The Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea" quickly went beyond the original focus of "safeguarding our homes and defending our motherland," entering a new stage in which the emphasis was the Communist leadership's contribution to the creation of a powerful and prestigious "new China." Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders clearly felt that continuous Communist victories on the Korean battlefield would broaden and deepen this movement. On 2 February, the CCP Central Committee issued "Instructions on Promoting the Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea among All Walks in the Country." The document called upon the whole party and the entire country to echo the CPV's victories in Korea by bringing the "Great Patriotic Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea" to deeper levels. It particularly emphasized that the movement should be directed to "raise the contempt and hatred of the U.S. imperialists" while "encouraging [Chinese people's] national self-confidence and self-respect." Beijing's leaders hoped that by allowing this movement to penetrate into every cell of Chinese society it would result in the Chinese people's innermost acceptance of "the leadership of Chairman Mao, the People's Government, and the Chinese Communist Party."⁶⁴ Two weeks later, an enlarged CCP politburo meeting reempha-

sized Mao's view of the importance of making the "Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea" a nationwide endeavor, so that everyone in China would be "reeducated" through their participation.⁶⁵ Beijing clearly did not welcome a cease-fire at this moment.

However, the Chinese/North Korean forces lacked the capacity to turn Beijing's ambition into reality. To the surprise of the Chinese commanders in Korea, a U.S./UN counteroffensive began on 25 January. Peng Dehuai's troops were short of ammunition and food, and the commander thus proposed to Mao on 27 January that they retreat. He also asked if "the Chinese and Korean side would favor a cease-fire by a certain deadline and [whether] the Chinese People's Volunteers and Korean People's Army (KPA) could offer to retreat 15-30 kilometers" in order to "deepen the contradictions within the imperialist camp."⁶⁶ Mao, not ready to give up the illusion of a total victory, ordered Peng the next day to answer the American offensive with a Chinese counteroffensive (which would be the fourth Chinese offensive campaign in Korea). He even believed that the CPV/KPA forces had the strength to reach the 37th or even the 36th parallels.⁶⁷ Peng, again, had to obey Mao's order.

But the Chinese counteroffensive, as Peng had predicted, was quickly repulsed by U.S./UN troops, presenting Chinese forces with greater difficulties.⁶⁸ On 21 February, Peng returned to Beijing to report to Mao in person the real situation on the battlefield. Peng believed that the Chinese/North Korean forces should take up defensive positions, that new troops should be sent to Korea to replace those units that had suffered heavy casualties, and that preparations should begin for a counteroffensive in the spring.⁶⁹ In light of Peng's report, Mao's ideas on Chinese strategy in Korea began to change subtly. He now acknowledged that the war would be prolonged and that the best strategy was to rotate Chinese troops in Korea so that they could take turns fighting the UN forces. Still, however, Mao believed that the Chinese could push the UN forces out of Korea by annihilating American reinforcements continuously.⁷⁰

After two months of readjustment and preparations, the Chinese/North Korean high command gathered twelve armies to launch an offensive in late April, hoping to destroy the bulk of UN forces and to establish clear Communist superiority on the battlefield. In a 19 April order to mobilize the troops for this campaign, Chinese field commanders in Korea pointed out that "this is the campaign that will determine the fate and length of the Korean War."⁷¹ Without proper air cover⁷² and reliable logistical supply, however, the offensive failed. In the last stage of the campaign, several Chinese units that had penetrated too deeply into the UN-controlled areas were surrounded by counterattacking U.S./UN forces. The Chinese 180th Division was almost totally lost.⁷³

Coming to the Negotiation Table

The Communist defeat in the fifth campaign forced Mao and the other Chinese leaders to reconsider their aims on the Korean battlefield. Realizing that a huge gap existed between the capacity of Chinese troops in Korea and the ambitious aims that Beijing had assigned to them, Mao became willing to conclude the war short of a total Chinese/North Korean victory.⁷⁴ In late May 1951, Beijing's military planners, following Mao's instructions, conducted an overall review of China's strategies in Korea. Nie Rongzhen, China's acting chief of staff, summarized the consequences of this review process in his memoirs: "After the Fifth Campaign, the Central Committee met to consider what steps we should take next. The opinion of the majority is that our forces should stop at the 38th parallel, continue fighting during the armistice talks, and strive to settle the war through negotiations. I, too, agreed with this opinion. In my view, by driving the enemy out of northern Korea, we had achieved our political objective. Stopping at the 38th parallel, which meant a return to the pre-war status, would be easily accepted by all sides involved."⁷⁵ Furthermore, in reassessing the probable impact that an armistice would have on China's domestic situation and international status, Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders concluded that the success of the Chinese troops in pushing the U.S./UN forces back from the Yalu River to areas close to the 38th parallel had sufficiently put them in a position to claim that China had *already* achieved a great victory.⁷⁶ Under these circumstances, the CCP leadership decided at the end of May that China would adopt a new strategy, one with a keynote of "fighting while negotiating," and China's operational aims would now be redefined as pursuing an armistice by restoring the prewar status in Korea.⁷⁷

Kim Il-sung, however, hoped to maintain the Communist offensive. In a letter to Peng Dehuai on 30 May, Kim emphasized that "certainly we may predict that the Korean problem cannot be solved in peaceful ways, and that the war will not end at the 38th parallel. In view of this, my opinion is that we should prolong our military offensive, and should continue to attack the enemy."⁷⁸ In order to coordinate the strategy between the Chinese and North Koreans, the Chinese leaders invited Kim Il-sung to visit Beijing in early June.⁷⁹ Chinese and Russian sources now available do not offer detailed coverage of the discussions between Mao and Kim, but evidence indicates that because Kim was unwilling to accept China's new position, it was difficult for the two parties to reach a consensus. Kim argued that the Chinese/North Korean forces still held a superior position on the battlefield and that it would be better if they put the negotiation option on hold until more enemy forces were annihilated. Mao, however, emphasized that if the negotiations would include conditions

such as the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea and the settlement of the Korean question, the Chinese/North Korean side had no reason not to come to the negotiation table.⁸⁰ Since the Chinese troops were the main combat force in Korea and Kim himself had no strength to fight the UN forces independently, he had to yield to the new Chinese strategy.⁸¹ Consequently, Mao and Kim agreed that they would start formal negotiations with the Americans to stop the war at the 38th parallel, and that, at the very least, Chinese/North Korean forces would not start another strategic offensive in the coming two months.⁸²

In mid-June, Mao and the CCP leadership were ready to implement the new strategy of “preparing for a prolonged war while striving to end the war through peace negotiations.”⁸³ In a telegram to Gao Gang and Kim Il-sung dated 13 June, Mao Zedong pointed out that because the Chinese and North Korean forces must maintain “a defensive position in the next two months,” it would be better to “wait for the enemy to make an appeal [for negotiation].” He also hoped that “the Soviet government would make an inquiry to the American government about an armistice.” In terms of the conditions for the armistice, the Chinese would be willing to accept the restoration of the border at the 38th parallel and the creation of a neutral zone between North and South Korea. The PRC’s entrance into the UN, Mao made clear, would not be a condition for armistice. On Taiwan, Mao believed that “the question should be raised in order to bargain with them,” but “if America firmly insists that the question of Taiwan be resolved separately, then we will make a corresponding concession.”⁸⁴

Probably because Kim Il-sung was not completely persuaded by Beijing’s argument,⁸⁵ on 10 June Gao Gang, representing Beijing, and Kim Il-sung, representing the North Koreans, traveled to Moscow to consult with Stalin, whom they met on 13 June. According to the memoirs of Shi Zhe, the Chinese interpreter attending the meeting, the discussions focused on three crucial questions: (1) What was the real situation on the battlefield? (2) By comparing the strength of the two sides, did the Chinese/North Korean forces still hold an upper hand? (3) Was the enemy planning a counteroffensive? And, if it was, were the Chinese/North Korean troops in a position to repulse it? In presenting their opinions to Stalin, Gao Gang and Kim Il-sung must have misused such terms as “armistice,” “reconciliation,” “cease-fire,” “truce,” and “peace agreement” because Stalin asked them to define these terms clearly, so that he would know where the discussions would lead. Gao Gang and Kim Il-sung finally agreed that what the Chinese and North Koreans wanted to pursue was an *armistice* on the basis of a *cease-fire*. Consequently, with Stalin’s

endorsement, the Chinese and North Koreans reached a consensus that they would now work for an armistice through negotiations, and that their bottom line would be the restoration of Korea’s prewar status.⁸⁶ On 13 June, Stalin informed Mao Zedong that he, Gao Gang, and Kim Il-sung had reached the conclusion that “an armistice is now advantageous.”⁸⁷

On 23 June, Jacob Malik, Soviet representative to the UN, formally called for “a cease-fire and an armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the 38th parallel,” and he mentioned nothing about the withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea, China’s seat in the UN, or the Taiwan question.⁸⁸ Beijing immediately endorsed the Soviet initiative.⁸⁹ The U.S./UN side responded positively to the Communist call for negotiation, and on 24 June, Trygve Lie, UN secretary general, stated that he hoped the armistice negotiations would start at the earliest possible time. The next day, President Truman announced that the United States was willing to participate in negotiations leading to an armistice in Korea.⁹⁰ By early July, the two sides had agreed that negotiations would start on 10 July at Kaesong.

Defining China’s Negotiation Strategies

Negotiating with the Americans was a new challenge for Beijing’s leaders. From 1944 to 1946, the Chinese Communists had been engaged in a series of contacts with the Americans during the CCP-Nationalist talks for averting the civil war, but that experience did not involve direct negotiations between the CCP and the United States.⁹¹ To guarantee Beijing’s direct control of the negotiation process, top CCP leaders acted immediately to organize China’s negotiation team. Generals Deng Hua and Xie Fang of the CPV and General Nam Il of the KPA would lead the Chinese/North Korean negotiators; but a behind-the-scenes “negotiation direction group” was formed to guarantee that the negotiations “follow[ed] correct strategies and tactics.” Li Kenong, vice foreign minister and the CCP’s longtime military intelligence head, and Qiao Guanhua, head of the Foreign Ministry’s International Information Bureau who had had extensive experiences in dealing with the Americans in the 1940s, were assigned to lead the group.⁹² Before Li and Qiao left Beijing, Mao had a long conversation with them, emphasizing that they should treat the coming negotiations as a “political battle” and should always follow the policy lines formulated in Beijing. Mao also instructed them to maintain daily telegraphic communications with Beijing’s top leaders.⁹³ This group arrived at Kim Il-sung’s headquarters early on 6 July, and the North Koreans agreed that the negotiations would be directed by this group, with Li as the “team head” and Qiao as the “director.”⁹⁴

Beijing's other main concern was how to justify to the Chinese people the new strategy of ending the war. On 3 July, the CCP Central Committee issued "Instructions on the Propaganda Affairs Concerning the Peace Negotiations in Korea." The CCP leadership stated that "we have always favored settling the Korean problem through peaceful means, and that peace has been the very purpose of the CPV's participation in the anti-aggression war in Korea." The document then pointed out that the "War of Resisting America and Assisting Korea" had succeeded in the past eight months not only in "defending the security of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and PRC," but also in "forcing the Americans to give up their original plans of aggression and to acknowledge the Chinese people's strength." It was the Americans, the CCP leadership emphasized, who solicited negotiation and an armistice. Whether or not the negotiation would lead to peace, the CCP leadership alleged, the political initiative was already firmly in Beijing's control.⁹⁵

Beijing's leaders believed that an armistice agreement could be reached in a short period (perhaps in weeks). In a telegram to Peng Dehuai and Gao Gang (and conveyed to Kim Il-sung) on 2 July, Mao predicted that "it would take ten to fourteen days to prepare and to conduct the negotiations with the representatives from the other side." He ordered Gao Gang to "make the maximum effort" to transport the Chinese "reinforcements, weapons, and ammunition into North Korea within ten days . . . , in order to prepare for a situation in which no personnel and matériel transportation would be allowed." He also instructed Chinese negotiators to "think about what could occur after the signing of an agreement on cessation of military operations and [to] be prepared for everything that needs to be done."⁹⁶ The Chinese negotiators in Korea, including Li Kenong and Qiao Guanhua, brought only summer clothing with them since they all assumed that the negotiation would end long before Korea's bitter winter set in.⁹⁷

Underlying Beijing's assumption that the negotiation process would be brief was the belief that the Chinese/North Korean forces still held a superior position on the battlefield. Although the Chinese setbacks in the fifth campaign had convinced both Beijing's leaders and the Chinese field commanders that it was impossible for China to achieve a total military victory in Korea, they believed that the conflict of the past eight months would have taught the Americans that a UN victory was equally impossible.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Beijing's leaders assumed that their conditions for an armistice—the restoration of the prewar status, that is, the forces of both sides returning to the 38th parallel—would be acceptable to (if not necessarily welcomed by) the Americans. Among other things, Beijing's leaders believed that it was the Americans who

first proposed such a solution, and that the solution would allow each side to claim that it had not been defeated in the war.⁹⁹ The most difficult spots in the negotiation, in Beijing's view, would not be over reaching an armistice, but on issues such as the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea, the settlement of the Taiwan question, and China's seat at the UN. Since Beijing's leaders were now willing to resolve these tough issues after the armistice was reached, they expected that the negotiations leading to an armistice would not last long.¹⁰⁰

However, as they had been taught by China's civil war, Beijing's leaders would leave other options open. They understood that only when they were backed by a strong military position on the battlefield would they be able to pursue the best terms at the negotiation table. Because it was still possible that the negotiations would be prolonged, they must remain powerful militarily. When the date and place for negotiations had been decided, the Beijing leadership and CPV commanders in Korea began planning a sixth campaign. On 2 July, Peng Dehuai ordered all CPV and KPA units to "maintain high vigilance" against the enemy, who, in Peng's view, might conduct a sudden offensive under the cover of negotiation. He emphasized that "peace would not be achieved without going through onerous struggles."¹⁰¹ The same evening, Mao ordered Chinese troops in Korea to get ready to launch an offensive and to punish the enemy at any time.¹⁰² In turn, the staff at CPV headquarters began to formulate plans for a sixth Chinese offensive campaign in Korea. Chinese commanders planned to gather thirteen CPV and four KPA armies, with the assistance of twenty-two Soviet and Chinese air brigades, to annihilate two UN divisions and drive UN forces on the eastern front back to areas south of the 38th parallel. On 8 July, CPV headquarters ordered the start of preparations for the campaign (also known as the September campaign).¹⁰³

The negotiations at Kaesong quickly encountered a series of obstacles. In the first two weeks, the two sides were unable to reach an agreement on the negotiation agenda. While the Chinese/North Korean negotiators argued that, in addition to a cease-fire, the withdrawal of "all foreign troops" should be an integral part of an armistice, the U.S./UN representatives insisted that only the military issues related to ending the conflict in Korea should be discussed. Not until 26 July did the two sides approve a five-part agenda for continuous negotiations. They agreed to (1) adopt an agenda; (2) fix a military demarcation line; (3) make concrete arrangements for an armistice in Korea; (4) make arrangements related to prisoners of war; and (5) make recommendations on related issues to governments of both sides.¹⁰⁴

The next stage of negotiations was even more tortuous. After 26 July, the two parties began to focus their discussions on the second item on the agenda,

the fixation of the demarcation line. The Chinese/North Korean side, following the agreement reached between Beijing, Pyongyang, and Moscow, proposed that the demarcation line be on the 38th parallel. The U.S./UN side, however, countered with a line running basically between Pyongyang and Wonsan, about twenty to thirty (in some places forty) kilometers north of the existing front line between the Communist and UN forces, demanding more than 13,000 square kilometers of territory still under Communist control.¹⁰⁵ Admiral Charles Turner Joy, the chief U.S./UN negotiator, argued that since the UN forces controlled the airspace over all Korean territory and the sea around the Korean Peninsula, they should be awarded additional territory on the ground in an armistice agreement.¹⁰⁶ The Americans used arguments like this to bargain for a solution to end the war that was most advantageous to them, but Beijing's leaders viewed them as evidence of Washington's lack of interest in reaching an armistice.¹⁰⁷

The slow progress of the negotiations caused differences of opinion to emerge among CPV commanders and Chinese negotiators. Peng Dehuai believed that there was little hope for the negotiations to move forward unless the Chinese/North Korean forces could put new military pressure on the Americans. He cabled Mao on 24 July, stating that it was doubtful that the Americans would be willing to reach an armistice at this moment. He believed that in order to pursue an armistice, the Communist forces needed to win "several victorious battles, and advance to areas south of the 38th parallel." And then, Peng suggested, "we may return to the 38th parallel and conduct negotiations [with the enemy], so that all foreign troops will gradually withdraw from Korea on a mutually balanced basis." Peng proposed that the Communist forces complete preparations for a counteroffensive by mid-August, and that, if the enemy had failed to start an offensive by then, they conduct the offensive in September.¹⁰⁸ Two days later, Mao approved Peng's plans. The CCP chairman emphasized that "it is absolutely necessary that our troops actively prepare for starting the offensive in September."¹⁰⁹ On 1 August, Mao approved the dispatch of the Twentieth Army Corps, a force composed of over 100,000 soldiers, to Korea to reinforce Chinese troops there. He also instructed the CPV to stockpile sufficient ammunition for the September campaign.¹¹⁰

Washington's aggressive attitude toward fixing the demarcation lines further convinced Peng and his comrades that a "reasonable settlement" of the Korean conflict would not be reached unless the Chinese could teach the Americans "another lesson" on the battlefield.¹¹¹ On 8 August, Peng Dehuai cabled Mao, reporting that the CPV had started the mobilization for the sixth campaign, and that this campaign aimed to annihilate the American Third

Division and the South Korean Second Division, thus pushing the front line back to areas south of the 38th parallel.¹¹² On 17 August, the CPV headquarters issued the primary order to start the sixth campaign.¹¹³

Deng Hua, the CPV's vice commander, and several other top CPV officers, however, concluded that the Chinese intention of using military strength to enhance their position at the negotiation table had encountered an equally determined American response. Policymakers in Washington seemed willing to risk, in a worst-case scenario, the breakdown of the negotiation process to ensure that an armistice would be reached on their terms.¹¹⁴ In mid-August, before the CPV's sixth campaign began, the U.S./UN ground forces started an offensive. Meanwhile, the American air force intensified its bombardment of the Communist supply network. The Communist lines were slowly pushed northward. Deng Hua sent a telegram to Peng Dehuai on 18 August, emphasizing the dramatic danger involved in the CPV's sixth offensive campaign. He pointed out that the U.S./UN forces had established a highly consolidated defensive system and that a Chinese/North Korean offensive campaign might result in another major failure, which would place the Chinese/North Korean side in a much less favorable position both on the battlefield and at the negotiation table. Deng believed that it would be better for the Communist forces to maintain a defensive position, force the enemy to take the offensive, and then repulse the enemy.¹¹⁵

Deng's view was widely shared by Chinese negotiators at Kaesong. In mid-August, members of the Chinese negotiation team, including Li Kenong, Qiao Guanhua, and Xie Fang, held a series of discussions about the prospects of and problems facing the negotiations. They all agreed that "considering the other side's consistent attitude from the beginning of the negotiations and the overall situation outside of the negotiations," the Americans would likely be unwilling to yield to the Chinese/North Korean proposal of setting up the armistice line along the 38th parallel. They also concluded that the Americans' bottom line would be an on-site armistice plus some minor adjustments and that if the Chinese/North Korean side stuck to the 38th parallel solution, the negotiations would fail. On 12 August, they proposed that Beijing adopt a new stand based on an on-site cease-fire.¹¹⁶

Beijing's leaders had to reconsider how best to define China's strategies to end the war. As early as 10 August, Mao instructed Zhou Enlai and Nie Rongzhen to review the CPV's plans for the sixth campaign, focusing on the feasibility of the campaign's goals as set by Chinese commanders.¹¹⁷ On 18 August, the day after the CPV issued the mobilization order for the sixth campaign, top Beijing leaders met to further contemplate all factors related to the cam-

paign.¹¹⁸ On 19 August, the Central Military Commission of the CCP (CMC) sent a long telegram to Chinese commanders in Korea, instructing them to reconsider campaign plans. The telegram began with an analysis of the situation in Korea and Washington's intentions to cope with it. The CMC believed that the American objection to setting up the 38th parallel as the demarcation line was based more on political considerations than on military ones: on the one hand, sustained tension in Korea would help maintain the unity between the United States and its allies; on the other, Washington did not want to solve the Korean problem before the signing of a peace treaty with Japan. Therefore, the CMC predicted that, although it was unlikely for Washington to break off negotiations completely or to expand the war to China (since this would cause serious problems between Washington, London, and Paris), it was possible that the armistice negotiations would be drawn out. In line with these observations and speculations, the CMC instructed the CPV commanders to reconsider the necessity of waging a sixth campaign. The CMC particularly emphasized that unless Chinese commanders in Korea were certain that the sixth campaign would lead to the destruction of two enemy divisions and that it would not result in another Chinese/North Korean military setback, the campaign should be called off.¹¹⁹

While the Chinese were examining their strategies to end the war, a series of potentially explosive incidents occurred at Kaesong. On 4 August, a group of armed Chinese soldiers "mistakenly" entered the site where the armistice talks were conducted, and two weeks later, on 19 August, a Chinese platoon leader was shot in the neutral zone at Kaesong. Three days later, the Chinese/North Korean side alleged that the conference site had been bombed by a UN plane.¹²⁰ On 23 August, the day after the last incident, top leaders in Beijing instructed the Chinese negotiators to respond to this American violation with a "firm strike, even if that meant that the negotiations would be prolonged or broken."¹²¹ The Chinese/North Korean side immediately suspended the negotiations.¹²²

The Chinese walkout at this moment did not mean that Beijing was no longer interested in ending the war through negotiations;¹²³ nor was it simply a gesture designed to strengthen Beijing's bargaining power. Beijing's leaders wanted an opportunity to reassess their position on the battlefield, as well as at the negotiation table, so that they could clarify and, if necessary, redefine China's negotiation strategies in light of the first forty days of the armistice talks.¹²⁴ In addition, since Western powers were to meet in San Francisco early in September to sign a unilateral peace treaty with Japan, excluding China and

the Soviet Union, Beijing's leaders wanted to see what Washington would do in Korea after that.¹²⁵

In the ensuing two months, top leaders in Beijing and CPV commanders and Chinese negotiators in Korea focused their review of China's negotiation strategies on three key questions: (1) What caused the seemingly unyielding American attitude at the negotiation table? (2) What were the best terms that the Chinese/North Korean side could obtain through negotiations and what should be their bottom line? (3) Given the need to maintain Beijing's bottom line and the means available to do so, what were the best strategies for the Chinese/North Korean side to adopt?

During this review process, Beijing's leaders realized that their initial ideas about how to conduct the negotiations had been too simplistic and too optimistic. Among other things, they could clearly sense that underlying the American arrogance at the negotiation table was a strong sense of U.S./UN superiority on the battlefield, and that unless they could let the Americans "cool their heels," it would be next to impossible for the negotiations to be settled under the Chinese terms.¹²⁶ Furthermore, Beijing's seven-week contact with the Americans made it apparent that the outcome of the negotiations for both sides involved a question of "face." If the Americans were allowed to win an upper hand in this "serious political struggle," Beijing's leaders believed, the Chinese Communist authority at home and its reputation and influence abroad, two main concerns behind China's intervention in Korea, would suffer.¹²⁷ Beijing's leaders concluded that they could not afford to lose this battle of wills.

However, both top Beijing leaders and CPV commanders had by now realized that weak points did exist in the Chinese/North Korean positions on the battlefield. Even with the long-planned Chinese air force's entry into the war in September 1951, the U.S./UN side still maintained solid control of Korea's airspace. Logistical vulnerability thus continued to hamper the CPV's combat capacity. In addition, there was always the possibility that UN forces, with control of the sea, would carry out amphibious landing operations in the rear of the Chinese/North Korean line, which would doom any Chinese/North Korean offensive to failure. Considering these factors, Beijing's leaders and CPV commanders agreed that it would not be in their interests to try to put more pressure on the Americans by expanding war operations.¹²⁸ In late October 1951, they finally decided to call off the sixth campaign.

As a result of this comprehensive review, a series of more clearly defined Chinese negotiation strategies came into shape. Even though "preparing for

a prolonged war while striving to end the war through peace negotiations" remained the keynote of Chinese strategies, the Chinese/North Korean forces would give up using large-scale offensive operations to force the enemy to come to China's terms. The Chinese now adopted a strategy of aggressive defense on the battlefield, with the hope that the prospect of increasing casualties in an endless war would eventually force U.S./UN forces to meet Beijing's minimum demands at the negotiation table. In other words, Beijing's leaders believed that as long as the Chinese troops were not defeated in Korea, they would be in a position to claim a victory.¹²⁹ The Chinese were now ready to return to the negotiation table. On 25 October, armistice talks were resumed at Panmunjom.

Although they talked about the possibility of "prolonged negotiations," top Beijing leaders still looked forward to a relatively quick ending of the war. On 14 November 1951, Mao Zedong sent a lengthy telegram to Stalin in which he discussed China's negotiation strategies. The CCP chairman postulated that as the talks resumed, the United States faced increasing domestic and international pressures to reach an armistice in Korea, improving the chance for peace. Beijing's leaders thus believed that China's new strategy of accepting a demarcation line based on the actual line of contact between the two sides had swept away the main barriers on that issue. They also maintained that adding countries such as Sweden to the list of neutral countries that would be supervising the armistice could resolve that issue, and that the prisoners-of-war issue could be resolved by a mutual agreement to return all POWs after the armistice. Mao and the CCP leadership thus concluded that it was possible to achieve an armistice before the end of the year. Nevertheless, Mao's telegram stated that Chinese negotiators should not demonstrate excessive eagerness to reach an armistice and should prepare for the war to continue for another six months or one year. The fundamental Chinese approach, the telegram emphasized, should be that "it is fine if peace can be reached, but it will not worry us if the war is prolonged."¹³⁰

The Chinese negotiation direction group discussed Mao's instructions on 20 November. The majority of the group believed that if an agreement could be reached on the demarcation lines, there was a good opportunity to conclude an armistice by the end of the year; and since the enemy had demonstrated no ability to break Chinese defensive lines, there was no reason that an agreement on the demarcation lines would not be reached in the near future. Only Qiao Guanhua suggested that the POW issue might cause trouble.¹³¹

For a while, Chinese optimism seemed to be well-founded. Two days after

their meeting, an agreement on the demarcation lines was reached. On 27 November, negotiators agreed to accept the actual line of contact between the two sides.¹³² An armistice now seemed near.

Deadlock: The POW Issue

Optimism about an early end to the war, however, proved to be short-lived. When the two sides established a demarcation line on the map, a condition was attached to it: the line would be held only if other issues outstanding at the armistice talks were settled within thirty days. This time limit proved too brief to resolve the remaining issues. The discussions on item three of the agreed-upon negotiations agenda (making concrete arrangements for an armistice in Korea) began on 27 November. By the 27 December deadline, only marginal progress had been achieved. The two sides would not settle this item until early May of 1952. To speed up the negotiation process, discussions about item five (making recommendations on related issues to governments of both sides) began on 31 January 1952. On 19 February, the two sides finally agreed that within ninety days after the signing of the armistice agreement, a political conference would be convened to discuss the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea and the general issues regarding a peaceful settlement of the Korean problem.¹³³ It was soon clear, however, that the real obstacle lay in item four, the POW issue. The negotiations for solving this issue began on 11 December 1951, and they continued for seventeen long months.

The Chinese had not anticipated that the POW issue would create a deadlock in the armistice talks. In the initial stage of China's entry into the war, guided by the People's Liberation Army's experience during the Chinese civil war, Chinese commanders, with Mao's approval, ordered the release of several groups of U.S./UN prisoners on the battlefield with the hope that this would help demolish the enemy troops' morale.¹³⁴ Not anticipating that the POW issue could become so important, Mao even put the power of determining when and how many enemy POWs should be released into the hands of Chinese field commanders, allowing them to make decisions without reporting to Beijing in advance.¹³⁵

Indeed, after the armistice talks were under way, Mao and the Beijing leadership did not take the POW issue too seriously. In several telegrams to CPV commanders and Chinese negotiators in July 1951, Mao treated the POW issue lightly, believing that after other "important issues" had been resolved, it would be quickly decided that all POWs would be exchanged.¹³⁶ As late as 14 November 1951, when analyzing Washington's negotiation strategies, Mao

continued to believe that the Chinese/North Korean desire to exchange all POWs after the armistice would be acceptable to the Americans.¹³⁷ Although some Chinese negotiators, such as Qiao Guanhua, suspected that the settlement of the POW issue could be complicated, Beijing's leaders and Chinese negotiators generally treated it as one of secondary importance.¹³⁸

The first major conflict regarding prisoners of war occurred in mid-December 1951, when each side challenged the numbers of POWs under the other side's custody: the Americans found that only 25 percent of America's missing in action were contained on the Communist list, and the Chinese/North Korean negotiators wanted to know why the UN command had removed 44,000 names from its previous list of Communist POWs.¹³⁹ When little progress was made in clarifying these problems, the Chinese and North Koreans became increasingly suspicious, claiming that the U.S./UN side was attempting to retain large numbers of Communist POWs.¹⁴⁰ This suspicion was finally confirmed on 2 January 1952, when the U.S./UN side formally proposed that the repatriation of POWs be carried out on a voluntary basis and that those refusing to return home would be released on the condition that they would not bear arms in the Korean conflict again.¹⁴¹

The Americans justified their stand on the POW issue by arguing that this was a problem concerning basic human rights.¹⁴² In actuality, policymakers in Washington realized that, from a political point of view, if large numbers of Communist POWs chose to remain in the "free world," the U.S./UN side would occupy an extremely favorable position to launch an anti-Communist propaganda offensive. American military planners believed that returning all Communist POWs, who outnumbered the U.S./UN prisoners by almost ten to one, would certainly infuse new blood into the Communist regime and was thus unacceptable. In terms of its impact on America's bargaining power at the negotiation table, the fact that the U.S./UN side had more POWs under its custody than the Communists was a chip no one could ignore. Finally, the Syngman Rhee government's tough attitude toward this issue limited the flexibility of U.S./UN negotiators.¹⁴³ Within this context, the Americans firmly adhered to the position of nonforcible repatriation after its introduction in early January 1952. On 28 April, the U.S./UN negotiators introduced a "final" package proposal, the key part of which was that the POWs would not be repatriated forcibly and that only 70,000 Chinese/North Korean prisoners, instead of the earlier agreed-upon number of 116,000, would be returned.¹⁴⁴

In the face of this unpredicted complexity, top Beijing leaders and Chinese negotiators focused their attention on the political aspect of the POW issue. In early May 1952, in a series of discussions on the essence of the U.S./UN pack-

age proposal of 28 April, members of the Chinese negotiation direction group concluded that the Americans aimed to achieve a politically superior position. In addition, Li Kenong pointed out that the Truman administration might not want to end the war at this moment for two reasons: first, in a presidential election year, Truman was concerned that a soft appearance might jeopardize the Democratic Party's electoral position; second, in order to increase military expenditures in the 1953 budget, the Korean War had to be continued.¹⁴⁵

When the POW question was put before top Beijing leaders, they further emphasized that the matter was in essence "a serious political struggle" and thus decided to fight the war for another year if necessary.¹⁴⁶ On 12 July 1952, the U.S./UN negotiators proposed to increase the total number of Chinese/North Korean POW returnees from 70,000 to 83,000. In two telegrams to Beijing dated 13 and 14 July, Li Kenong and the other Chinese negotiators suggested that this proposal be accepted as the basis for solving the POW issue, since 83,000 was not far below the 90,000 bottom-line figure that the Chinese negotiators had proposed.¹⁴⁷ But Mao Zedong immediately rebutted the suggestion and sternly criticized Li and his comrades for being politically naive. He stressed that the key question was not how many Chinese/North Korean POWs would be repatriated but which side, through the arrangement, would occupy a politically and militarily favorable position. If the Chinese accepted this U.S./UN proposal, the chairman warned, it would mean that they had yielded to the enemy's terms under political and military pressures.¹⁴⁸ Following Mao's instructions, the Chinese and North Korean negotiators rejected the proposal on 18 July.

Against this background, Beijing's leaders reexamined China's strategies to end the war in summer 1952. They were determined to give up any illusion of a quick end to the war and to carry out tit-for-tat struggles with the Americans both in the political sphere and on the battlefield. Not until the Chinese/North Korean side had improved both its military and political positions, Mao made it clear, would Beijing consider compromising on the POW issue.¹⁴⁹

It is within this context that Beijing initiated a propaganda campaign condemning Washington's alleged "dirty biological warfare" in North Korea and in China's Northeast. According to Chinese sources, as early as 28 January 1952, the CPV reported signs of possible American use of "biological weapons" in North Korea.¹⁵⁰ After careful deliberations and consultations, Beijing and Pyongyang decided to make the story public. On 22 February 1952, Pak Hon-yong, North Korea's foreign minister, issued a formal statement to condemn "the U.S. imperialist crime of conducting biological warfare against the Korean people." Two days later, Zhou Enlai issued a similar statement.¹⁵¹

Then the Chinese and North Korean Communists started a "condemning America" campaign to criticize this alleged crime and called for international investigation.¹⁵²

In retrospect, what really happened in Korea in the winter of 1951-52 must be regarded as one of the most mysterious aspects of the Korean War history: in my investigations into Beijing's archival sources, I found enough evidence to show that in early 1952 both CPV commanders and Beijing's leaders *truly believed* that the Americans had used biological weapons against the Chinese and North Koreans. On 18 February, for example, Nie Rongzhen sent to Mao and Zhou a report pointing out that the Americans had been engaged in biological warfare in Korea.¹⁵³ The next day, Mao read the report and instructed Zhou Enlai to "pay attention to this matter and take due measures to deal with it."¹⁵⁴ However, no convincing evidence has ever been produced on the American side to confirm the Chinese version of this story or to explain what really happened.¹⁵⁵

In any case, the Beijing leadership did find in the "American biological warfare" issue an effective weapon to counter Washington's use of the POW issue to gain a politically superior position.¹⁵⁶ When discussions about item four stalemated, Beijing made every effort to turn the condemnation of "American biological warfare" into a nationwide and even a worldwide campaign. From late March to early September, Beijing and Pyongyang invited three "international groups of investigation" to North Korea and China's Northeast to "gather evidence of U.S. use of biological weapons in the war."¹⁵⁷ Starting in May 1952, Beijing released "confessions" made by twenty-five captured American pilots who allegedly had been engaged in "biological warfare" against China and North Korea.¹⁵⁸ This "condemning America" campaign would reach its peak in late 1952 and early 1953.

In the meantime, Beijing made real efforts to strengthen the Communists' military position on the Korean battlefield. In August and September 1952, Zhou Enlai led a Chinese delegation to visit the Soviet Union to discuss, among other things, the acceleration of Soviet military aid to China.¹⁵⁹ Beijing also hastened the rotation of Chinese troops in Korea. The Twenty-third, Twenty-fourth, and Forty-sixth Armies entered Korea in fall 1952, and the First, Sixteenth, Twenty-first, and Fifty-fourth Armies entered Korea in January 1953. By early 1953, the total number of Chinese troops in Korea reached 1.35 million (including logistics units), the highest level during China's intervention in Korea.¹⁶⁰ In addition, extraordinary efforts were made to guarantee the Chinese/North Korean forces' logistical supply. During Zhou's visit to the Soviet Union, Stalin agreed to send five additional Soviet antiaircraft regi-

ments to Korea.¹⁶¹ In late 1952 and early 1953, Beijing dispatched six divisions of railway engineering troops to Korea to construct new railways and maintain existing ones. The CPV's Logistics Department stockpiled more than 120,000 tons of ammunition and more than 248,000 tons of grain in the winter and spring of 1952-53.¹⁶² Beijing's leaders also paid special attention to establishing a consolidated defensive system on Korea's east and west coasts to prevent possible U.S./UN landing operations in the Chinese/North Korean forces' rear. In November and December 1952, how to prepare for possible enemy landing operations became the single most important issue on the CPV's agenda. Mao believed that "if we could defeat this American attempt, the enemy would have nowhere to go, and his defeat will be certain."¹⁶³

Underlying China's rigid attitude toward the solution of the POW issue was a belief that the Chinese occupied a better position to fight a protracted war than did the United States. In a report to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on 4 August 1952, Mao Zedong emphasized that the United States had three fundamental weaknesses in fighting a prolonged war in Korea: First, the continuation of the war would cost more American lives, and the American population was much smaller than that of the Chinese. Second, a drawn-out war placed a severe financial burden on Washington. Third, America's strategic emphasis was in Europe, and an extended war in Korea would continue to disturb America's global strategic status.¹⁶⁴ On 17 October, Mao and Zhou sent a series of instructions to CPV commanders, stressing that the United States would encounter growing difficulties if it continued the war in Korea. They reasoned that the Americans were accustomed to letting other people fight for their interests, but they had been directly involved in the Korean War from the beginning. Furthermore, the continuation of the war would keep American military forces bogged down in Korea, and under such circumstances, Beijing's leaders asked, how could the United States afford a prolonged war in Korea?¹⁶⁵

There is no evidence to show that the Beijing leadership, while formulating this tough strategy, paid any significant attention to whether or not the Americans would use nuclear weapons in Korea. Although military planners in Beijing probably considered the possibility that the Americans would use nuclear weapons for tactical targets in Korea, Mao and the other Chinese leaders firmly believed that the outcome of the Korean conflict would be determined by ground operations.¹⁶⁶ Not surprising at all, then, when Mao and the other CCP leaders analyzed the means Washington might use to put pressure on the Communists, they did not even bother to mention the atomic bomb.

China's rigid strategies, combined with America's unyielding attitude, led

the negotiations at Panmunjom to a deadlock. After May 1952, when both sides announced a stalemate over the POW issue, talks at Panmunjom were frequently interrupted for weeks. On 8 October 1952, after the Communist side rejected the U.S./UN delegation's "final offer" on the POW question, the U.S./UN negotiators announced an indefinite recess of the negotiations.¹⁶⁷ The conclusion of the war seemed remote.

Breaking the Deadlock

Many researchers of the history of the Korean War have noted that a dramatic change in the Chinese/North Korean position came after Stalin's death in March 1953.¹⁶⁸ On 27 March, the Communists agreed to the U.S./UN suggestion that sick and wounded prisoners be exchanged first. Three days later, Zhou Enlai proposed that the POWs who were unwilling to be repatriated be transferred to a neutral state "so as to ensure a just solution to the question of their repatriation."¹⁶⁹ This statement reopened the door to an armistice, and discussions on resolving the POW issue resumed in late April. Some scholars, such as historian Kathryn Weathersby, have powerfully argued that Stalin's death played an important, if not decisive, role in the softening of the Communist attitude toward the POW issue, and that a logical argument following this speculation is that the tough Chinese approach over the POW issue reflected Stalin's unwillingness to end the Korean War.¹⁷⁰

New Chinese and Russian sources provide these arguments with some support. According to Chinese sources, when Zhou Enlai attended Stalin's funeral and then visited the Soviet Union from 7 to 24 March, he held extensive discussions with the new Soviet leaders. On the evening of 21 March, Zhou had a long meeting with almost all the members of the new Soviet leadership, including Georgy Malenkov, Nikita Khrushchev, Lavrenty Beria, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Nikolay Bulganin, to discuss the best possible solution of the Korean War. The result of these discussions was a consensus that "the Chinese and North Korean side was now in a position to conclude the war on the basis of reasonable compromises with the enemy."¹⁷¹ Recently released Russian sources also confirm that, while Zhou was in Moscow for Stalin's funeral, the Chinese and the Soviets worked out a common stand to "speed up the negotiations and the conclusion of an armistice" in Korea.¹⁷²

However, it is implausible to attribute completely the changing Chinese attitude over the POW issue to Stalin's death. Chinese sources now available demonstrate that a more conciliatory approach on Beijing's part had its own logic that can only be understood in a broader and more complex framework. Beijing's tough attitude toward the POW issue was designed not to close the

door to an armistice but to achieve favorable political and military positions before the Chinese returned to the negotiation table.¹⁷³ This position was certainly compatible with Beijing's overall management of the Korean crisis, which from the beginning centered around the crisis' domestic and international political implications. Therefore, Beijing's unyielding stand on the POW issue should be regarded more as a response to the Americans' use of the issue to put Beijing on the defensive than as an unwilling gesture made under Stalin's pressure.

No evidence in the Chinese and Russian sources now available indicates that serious differences existed between Beijing and Moscow regarding how the war should be ended in late 1952 and early 1953. When, in mid-August 1952, Zhou Enlai led a Chinese delegation to visit the Soviet Union, Stalin met with him at the Kremlin. Zhou briefed Stalin on China's domestic situation, international status, and recent developments in battlefield operations in Korea. He told Stalin that China would be willing to end the war based on acceptable conditions but would not yield to the unreasonable American terms. In Mao's view, he informed Stalin, if the Communists could demonstrate more patience than the Americans, the enemy would sooner or later make additional concessions. Zhou particularly emphasized that it was Mao's belief that a firm Communist stand in the armistice negotiations might prolong the war in Korea but would not trigger a third world war. Rather, in Mao's opinion, the conflict in Korea had exposed the weakness of the United States and delayed the coming of another world war. However, Zhou mentioned that the Chinese were having difficulties continuing war operations under the current conditions, especially since the Americans' artillery pieces outnumbered those of the Communist forces nine to one.¹⁷⁴

The focus of the discussion then turned to the Chinese/North Korean bottom line in negotiations with the United States, and how the bottom line would be maintained. Stalin offered detailed advice about negotiation strategies. He suggested that the Chinese/North Korean side take three steps in dealing with the Americans on the prisoner issue. First, if the enemy insisted on holding 30 percent of Chinese/North Korean prisoners, Beijing and Pyongyang could suggest holding about 13 percent of enemy's prisoners in exchange. The purpose would be to force the Americans to change their attitude. Second, if the first design failed to work, the Chinese/North Korean side could propose a cease-fire to be followed by an exchange of prisoners. Third, if the second proposal was unacceptable to the Americans, the Communists could recommend that prisoners who did not want to be returned be held temporarily by a neutral third country, and then, after the POWs' intentions were determined, they

would either be released or returned. In addition, Stalin agreed to send five Soviet anti-aircraft artillery regiments to Korea in order to strengthen the Chinese/North Korean position at the negotiation table. However, he warned the Chinese not to use their air force near the 38th parallel. He believed that, if the Chinese/North Korean side could be patient in negotiations while maintaining a powerful position on the battlefield, the Americans, who were not in a position to engage in a prolonged war in Korea, would sooner or later yield to one of the three alternatives.¹⁷⁵

To further coordinate the Communist strategies in dealing with the fighting and negotiations in Korea, at Zhou's suggestion, Stalin agreed to receive a high-ranking CPV and North Korean delegation in Moscow.¹⁷⁶ On 1 September 1952, Peng Dehuai, Kim Il-sung, and Pak Hon-Yong arrived in Moscow to join Zhou and Stalin in the discussions.¹⁷⁷ Stalin met with them three days later. The central issue was Soviet military support to the Chinese and North Koreans, and Stalin promised that the Soviet Union would strengthen the Chinese/North Korean air-defense system.¹⁷⁸ In another discussion between Stalin and Zhou on 19 September, which Mao instructed Zhou to arrange, the Chinese and the Soviets reached a consensus that the Chinese/North Korean side would not make concessions to the Americans until its political and military status had been further improved.¹⁷⁹

Beijing alone was responsible for its unyielding attitude over the POW issue, and that is most clearly demonstrated in two important documents. On 16 December 1952, in a telegram drafted by Zhou Enlai and signed by Mao Zedong, the leaders expressed that "the armistice negotiations had encountered a deadlock" and that "operations in Korea could be intensified in a given period in the future (say, a year)." The basis for this assessment was the belief that "the losses of American troops in Korea had not reached the extent that would force them to stop the fighting." Furthermore, Mao and Zhou were willing to wait to see what would happen after Eisenhower had assumed the presidency. They perceived that the only card the Americans had to play was to "conduct landing operations on both coasts to the rear of our troops," arguing that a key test would probably come in the spring of 1953. The implication was that Chinese policy could change after that time because the military situation in Korea would by then certainly have turned in their favor.¹⁸⁰

On 19 February 1953, Qiao Guanhua, following Zhou Enlai's instructions, sent a report to Beijing summarizing the Chinese negotiation team's analysis of the situation in Korea and the Chinese strategy at the moment. The report observed that there existed little possibility that the United States would initiate major military offensives on the Korean battlefield, and that the Eisen-

hower administration's new policy of "releasing Jiang" in the Taiwan Strait was designed to place more pressure on China rather than to allow Jiang to attempt amphibious operations against the Chinese mainland. (In other words, the Chinese negotiators believed that the Chinese/North Korean forces had achieved a relatively favorable position on the Korean battlefield.) But since the United States had referred the Korean problem again to the United Nations, and since the American military had not given up the illusion that UN forces could achieve further military superiority on the battlefield, it was unlikely that the Americans would soon return to Panmunjom. If China proposed an unconditional reopening of negotiations under these circumstances, the report speculated, the Americans might take it as an indication of Chinese weakness. The report therefore suggested that China should do nothing and wait for the Americans to take the next initiative.¹⁸¹ Mao and Zhou agreed with this analysis, and Mao even predicted that the Americans most likely would appeal to the Soviets to make the first move.¹⁸²

In this context, China's shifting attitude toward the POW issue in late March 1953 appears much more logical and less dramatic than it would seem otherwise. Stalin's death might have contributed to this reversal, but it was more an outgrowth of Beijing's existing policies based on Chinese leaders' assessment of the changing situation than a reflection of altering Soviet directives.

In the spring and summer of 1953, both the Chinese and the Americans were more willing than ever to accept an armistice. After the armistice talks resumed on 26 April, the negotiations progressed more smoothly than before. Although neither side had ever given up military preparations for another possible breakdown in the talks, the two sides resolved the POW question and reached an agreement regarding voluntary repatriation on 8 June.¹⁸³ Late in the evening, Zhou Enlai personally called Li Kenong, conveying his congratulations to all members of the Chinese negotiation team at Panmunjom.¹⁸⁴ By 15 June, the military staffs of the two sides had worked out what was supposed to be the final demarcation line. After twenty-three months of difficult negotiations, peace seemed just around the corner. At 6:00 P.M. the same day, Peng Dehuai, in the name of the commander of the joint Chinese-Korean headquarters, ordered all Chinese and North Korean units to cease offensive operations after 16 June.¹⁸⁵

The situation suddenly changed on the early morning of 18 June, when President Syngman Rhee released more than 25,000 anti-Communist North Korean prisoners held by South Korean forces.¹⁸⁶ That afternoon, top Beijing leaders Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De discussed the situation. In a telegram to the CPV and Chinese negotiators the next day, Mao said that he

believed it unlikely that the United States would support Rhee's attempt to delay a final agreement because this would put Washington under "tremendous pressures" at home and abroad. It was more likely, observed the chairman, that the Americans would force Rhee to accept an armistice. Mao now believed that the Chinese strategy should focus on "taking advantage of the contradictions between the Americans and the South Koreans."¹⁸⁷

At this moment, Peng Dehuai was on his way from Beijing to the Korean front to sign the armistice agreement. Believing that Rhee's behavior offered the Communist forces an opportunity to pursue a victorious campaign before the war finally concluded, he cabled Mao on 20 June, suggesting that the armistice be postponed until the end of the month and that in order "to deepen the contradictions among the enemies, we give Syngman Rhee's puppet forces another strike by annihilating 15,000 puppet troops."¹⁸⁸ Mao approved Peng's suggestions the next day,¹⁸⁹ and although Kim Il-sung had reservations about launching an offensive at this last stage of the war, Peng issued the operation order.¹⁹⁰

On 13 July, after three weeks of preparations, Chinese forces began an offensive campaign designed to punish the South Koreans, mauling Rhee's Capital Division and the Third Division before the South Korean troops were able to hold their ground. The CPV/KPA forces stopped the offensive on 20 July.¹⁹¹ Seven days later, the armistice was finally signed, and the three-year-long Korean War was over.

Conclusion

In order to understand the logic of China's shifting strategies during the Korean War, one must first comprehend Beijing's evolving aims during the war. Beijing's leaders, and Mao Zedong in particular, decided to enter the Korean War in October 1950 to protect China's physical security and, more importantly, to pursue a glorious victory over the American-led UN forces. Underlying this approach was the CCP leadership's desire—and Mao's desire in particular—to use the challenge and the threat brought about by the Korean crisis to cement Communist control of China's state and society, as well as to promote Communist China's international prestige and influence. China's strategies to end the war were therefore comprehensive and assertive.

The Chinese experience in Korea from October 1950 to May 1951, however, made it clear to Beijing's leaders that China's capacity to wage war did not equal its ambitious aims. It thus became necessary for Beijing's leaders to make fundamental adjustments to China's war objectives, as well as its strategies to end the war. After reassessing China's gains and losses in Korea and

consulting with Moscow and Pyongyang, Beijing's leaders changed their definition of "China's victory in Korea" by arguing that Communist China was already victorious since Chinese troops had pushed the U.S./UN force back to the 38th parallel. The Chinese negotiators came to the negotiation table in July 1951, believing that an armistice would soon follow.

The negotiation process turned out to be much more complicated than Beijing's leaders had expected. Not a single issue on the negotiation agenda could be resolved easily and, to the surprise of Beijing's leaders, the POW issue became the obstacle that produced a deadlock. Beijing's leaders found that the struggles at the negotiation table, especially those concerning the POW issue, were related to the essence of China's intervention in Korea, and they were determined not to lose this "serious political struggle." As a result, they adopted a tit-for-tat approach in handling the negotiations and in planning military operations on the battlefield. Consequently, this approach combined with an equally rigid American policy to make military conflicts in Korea drag on for another two years.

Beijing's changing policies toward concluding the military conflict in Korea had been shaped by many concerns, including how to accurately assess America's intentions and capabilities, how to coordinate with Pyongyang and Moscow in formulating diplomatic policies and military strategies, and how to evaluate China's comprehensive political and military gains and losses in a particular armistice agreement. But, most of all, Beijing's strategy toward ending the war was determined by the rationale behind the transformation of China's state and society and the promotion of its international prestige and influence. When the war ended, Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders could claim that they had been successful in reaching both their domestic and their international aims—although the price had been heavy.¹⁹² This success, in turn, would encourage Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders to treat Communist China's foreign policy as an integral part of China's continuous revolution. Communist China had further secured its status as a revolutionary power.

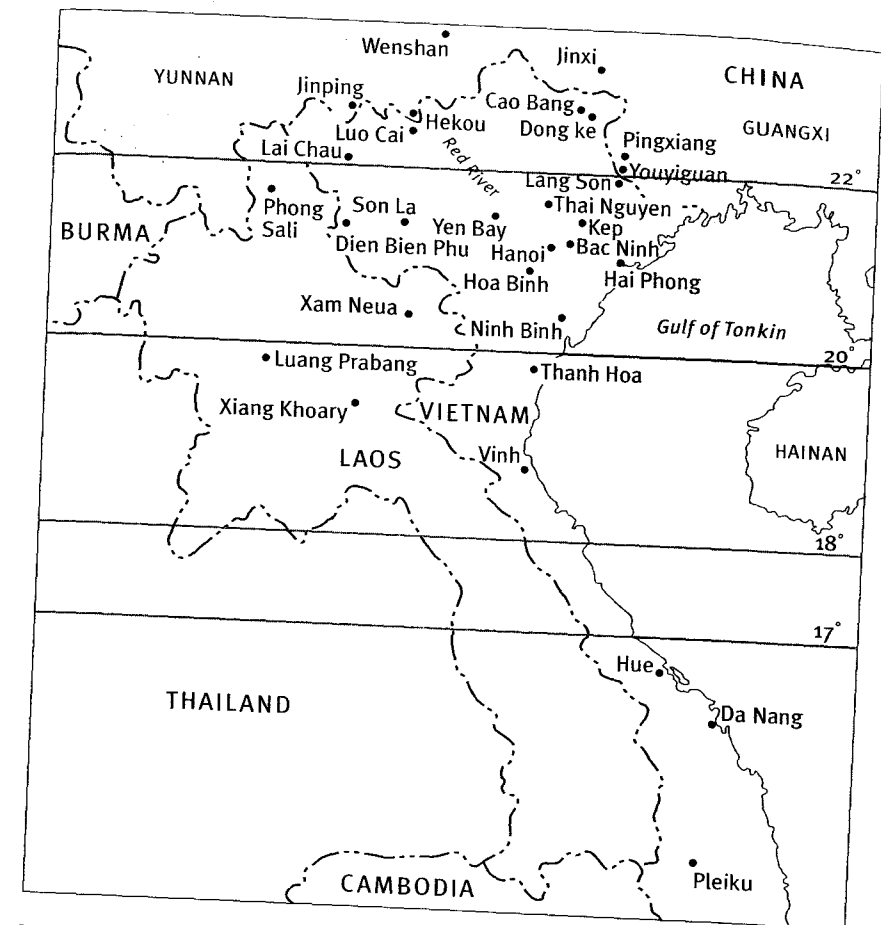


CHAPTER 5 CHINA AND THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR, 1950-1954

Despite its obvious significance, China's involvement in the First Indochina War has long been an under-researched and inadequately understood subject in Cold War studies. Until recently, because Chinese and Vietnamese sources were inaccessible, the many plausible English-language publications on the First Indochina War either completely ignore, or give only marginal attention to, China's connection to it. King Chen's *Vietnam and China, 1938-1954*, using contemporary newspapers and radio broadcasts, offers the most detailed and generally reliable treatment of the Chinese-Viet Minh relationship, but even this study is restricted by its sources and fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the strategic cooperation between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists. Consequently, the study leaves a crucial lacuna in judging the extent and nature of their relations.¹ This chapter uses recently released Chinese sources to shed new light on China's role in the First Indochina War.

Early Contacts between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists

The Chinese Communist Party and the Vietnamese Communists had a history of close associations. Early in the 1920s, Ho Chi Minh, who could speak fluent Chinese and often visited China, and many other Vietnamese Communists established contacts with their Chinese comrades in Europe.² In 1924, Ho was dispatched by the Comintern to China to assist Mikhail Borodin, the Soviet agent working for Sun Yatsen and the Guomindang government in Guangzhou.³ In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ho, while conducting revolutionary activities in China, became a member of the CCP-led Eighth Route Army and stayed in the CCP's Red capital Yan'an for several weeks.⁴ After the end of the Second World War, Ho's Indochina Communist Party (ICP; after 1951, the Vietnamese Workers' Party, or VWP)⁵ led a national uprising and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with Ho as president. When the French returned to reestablish their control, Ho and his fellow



INDOCHINA

Communists moved to mountainous areas to fight for independence. The First Indochina War began.

When the DRV was established, the CCP decided to send many of its Vietnamese members back to their own country to promote the Vietnamese revolution. After the outbreak of the First Indochina War, the Chinese Communist guerrilla forces in Chinese-Vietnamese border areas occasionally assisted the Viet Minh's military operations.⁶ The CCP's Hong Kong Bureau Branch, following the party Central Committee's orders, provided intermittent financial support for Ho and the Viet Minh.⁷ However, having its own revolution

as top priority, the CCP was unable to provide direct and substantial support to the Viet Minh before the end of 1949. Because of technical difficulties, no reliable telegraphic communications existed between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist leaderships during this period.⁸ Consequently, the Vietnamese Communists had to fight a war against the French basically by themselves from 1946 to late 1949.

Planning China's Support to the Viet Minh

The Chinese Communist victory in 1949 changed the international environment for the Vietnamese revolution. For the purpose of promoting the PRC's international reputation and enhancing its southern border security, the CCP leadership was willing to play an outstanding role in supporting the cause of their Communist comrades in Vietnam.

From late June to early August 1949, the CCP's second in command, Liu Shaoqi, secretly visited Moscow and held a series of meetings with Stalin and other Soviet leaders. A main part of the discussions covered how to promote an Asian revolution in general and the Vietnamese revolution in particular. The Chinese and Soviet leaders reached a general consensus that it was primarily the CCP's responsibility to provide support to the Vietnamese revolutionaries.⁹ On 24 December, during a meeting between Mao Zedong and Stalin in Moscow, the two leaders confirmed this arrangement.¹⁰

The Vietnamese Communists were also eager to receive support from their Chinese comrades. In August 1949, when the victorious Chinese People's Liberation Army, in chasing the remnants of the GMD forces, was about to reach the Chinese-Vietnamese border area, Ho Chi Minh wrote a letter to Mao Zedong, describing the situation in Vietnam and asking for Chinese aid in any and all forms. Ly Ban and Nguyen Duc Thuy, two ICP envoys with close personal ties to the CCP, delivered the letter to Beijing in October.¹¹ On 24 December 1949, Liu Shaoqi chaired a CCP politburo meeting to discuss China's support to Vietnam, which concluded with the decision to invite a high-ranking Vietnamese delegation to Beijing to "discuss all important issues." In order to learn more about the situation in Vietnam and to establish direct contacts with the Vietnamese Communists, the CCP leaders also decided to send Luo Guibo, a PLA commander who, as a guerrilla leader during the anti-Japanese war, had extensive experience in dealing with complicated situations, to Vietnam as the CCP's general representative.¹² On 25 and 28 December, Liu Shaoqi twice telegraphed Ho to inform him of these decisions, particularly mentioning that the PRC would dispatch a high-ranking adviser to Vietnam and was ready to grant

diplomatic recognition to the DRV.¹³ Early in January 1950, Hoang Van Hoan, an ICP Central Committee member with close ties to China, arrived in Beijing to establish direct contact with the CCP.¹⁴ On 18 January, the PRC formally recognized and established diplomatic relations with the DRV.¹⁵

Early in January, when Liu Shaoqi met with Luo Guibo to assign him to work in Vietnam, he made it clear that Luo's appointment was approved by Mao and the CCP Central Committee. Luo's task in Vietnam was to establish communications between the two parties as well as to provide the CCP leadership with firsthand materials for formulating plans to assist the Vietnamese Communists. Liu stressed to Luo that "it is the duty of those countries that have achieved the victory of their own revolution to support peoples who are still conducting the just struggle for liberation" and that "it is our international obligation to support the anti-French struggle of the Vietnamese people."¹⁶

While Luo was on his way to Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, after walking for seventeen days on foot, secretly arrived at China's Guangxi border around 20 January 1950.¹⁷ When Ho arrived in Beijing on 30 January, Liu Shaoqi received him the same evening and reported his visit to Mao Zedong, who was then in Moscow. Liu emphasized in his telegram to Mao that it was necessary for the CCP to "satisfy all of Ho's requests," to which Mao agreed completely.¹⁸ The CCP Central Committee immediately established an ad hoc commission composed of Zhu De, vice chairman of the Central People's Government and commander in chief of the People's Liberation Army, Nie Rongzhen, acting general chief of staff of the PLA, and Li Weihan, director of the United Front Department of the CCP Central Committee, to discuss with Ho his mission in China.¹⁹ Ho made it clear that he came to obtain a substantial Chinese commitment to support the Vietnamese Communists.²⁰ He also wished to meet Stalin and Mao in Moscow and obtain Soviet and Chinese military, political, and economic assistance. Through arrangements by the CCP and the CPSU, Ho left Beijing by train on the evening of 3 February and arrived in Moscow one week later.²¹

Ho's secret trip to Moscow brought him mixed results. Although the Soviet Union decided to recognize Ho's government, Stalin, in the wake of the 1948-49 Berlin crisis, had concerns in Europe and was unfamiliar with, and to a certain extent even suspicious of, Ho's intentions. He was therefore reluctant to commit the strength of the Soviet Union directly to the Vietnamese Communists and turned Ho to the Chinese.²² To Ho's great satisfaction, Mao and Zhou, first in Moscow and then in Beijing (to which Ho returned with Mao and Zhou on 3 March), promised that the CCP would do its best "to offer all

the military assistance Vietnam needed in its struggle against France." When Ho returned to Vietnam he was certain that he could now rely on China's support.²³

The CCP's attitude toward Vietnam was first and foremost the natural result of the Chinese Communists' belief that it was Beijing's mission to promote an Asian revolution following the Chinese model. Mao and other CCP leaders had consistently seen the Chinese Communist revolution as part of a world proletarian revolutionary movement initiated by the Russian Bolsheviks. As it progressed, however, and differed from the Russian revolution by concentrating on largely rural instead of urban areas, Mao and the CCP leadership had second thoughts about the nature and significance of their revolution. During 1948-49, they began to talk in terms of a much broader anti-imperialist Asian and world revolution. First, their model of revolution transcended China and offered an example of universal significance to other peoples struggling for national liberation. Second, the victory of the Chinese revolution represented the beginning of a new high tide of revolutionary movements of oppressed peoples in Asia and in the world. Consequently, they believed it their duty to assist Communist revolutionaries and national liberation movements in other countries in order to promote an Asia-wide or even worldwide revolution.²⁴

The CCP's policy of supporting the Vietnamese Communists was also consistent with Mao's "lean-to-one-side" approach, one of the cornerstones of the CCP's domestic and international policies in the early years of the PRC. As discussed earlier, during Liu Shaoqi's secret visit to the Soviet Union in late June-early August 1949, Stalin strongly encouraged the Chinese to take a larger role in promoting revolutionary movements in East Asia. When Mao visited Moscow, the Chinese and the Soviets further divided the sphere of responsibility between them, leaving the support of Communist revolutionaries in Vietnam as China's duty. The CCP's commitment to Ho's struggle in Vietnam was apparently compatible with this basic strategic arrangement between Beijing and Moscow.

CCP leaders also believed that standing by their Vietnamese comrades would serve their goal of safeguarding China's national security interests. Interestingly, Mao, though a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary, demonstrated an approach similar to many traditional Chinese rulers: the safety of the Central Kingdom could not be properly maintained if its neighboring areas fell into the hands of hostile "barbarian" forces. In 1949-50, while considering potential threats to China's national safety, Mao and the CCP leadership were particularly concerned with the prospect of a possible military confrontation

with imperialist countries and their acolytes in the Korean Peninsula, Indochina, and the Taiwan Strait. Convinced that events in these areas were closely interrelated, they viewed supporting the Vietnamese Communists as an effective means of strengthening their position against the threat to China from the United States.²⁵ This view was supported by the fact that some Chinese Nationalist units who were still loyal to Jiang Jieshi had fled to the Chinese-Vietnamese border area, making it a source of insecurity for the newly established Chinese Communist regime.²⁶ After the outbreak of the Korean War, although Mao and the CCP leadership placed the emphasis of their strategy regarding the United States on Korea, they continued to view the Vietnamese Communist struggle against the French as part of the overall anti-imperialist struggle in the Far East.²⁷ Thus, from Beijing's perspective, providing support to the Vietnamese Communists became an integral part of enhancing the PRC's vital security interests.

The Establishment of the Chinese Military Advisory Group

When the decision to support the Vietnamese Communists was made, the CCP moved forward immediately. On 13 March 1950, Liu Shaoqi telegraphed Luo Guibo, who had arrived in the Viet Minh's Viet Bac (northern Vietnam) base four days earlier, instructing him to start his work in two stages. First, he was to deal with the most urgent problems, including providing the CCP Central Committee with a clear idea about the way in which Chinese military, economic, and financial aid should be given to the Vietnamese and how that aid could reach Vietnam. Second, Luo was instructed to carefully investigate the overall military situation in Vietnam so that he could offer the CCP Central Committee suggestions about how to prepare a long-term strategy for beating the French colonialists.²⁸

In April 1950, the ICP Central Committee formally forwarded to Beijing a series of requests for support, including dispatch of Chinese military advisers, China taking the responsibility for training Viet Minh troops, and China's delivery of large amounts of ammunition and military equipment.²⁹ The CCP leadership responded immediately. On 17 April, the Central Military Commission of the CCP ordered each of the PLA's Second, Third, and Fourth Field Armies to provide advisers at battalion, regiment, and division levels for a Vietnamese division. The Third Field Army organized the headquarters of the Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAAG), and the Fourth Field Army set up a military school for the Vietnamese.³⁰ On 26 April, the CMC instructed the PLA Northwestern, Southwestern, Eastern, and South Central Headquar-

ters to offer another thirteen cadres over battalion level to join the CMAG to work with the Vietnamese Communists at the top commanding positions.³¹ The military advisers gathered in Beijing during May and received indoctrination courses on the CCP's international policy. They also met top CCP leaders to receive instructions. General Wei Guoqing, political commissar of the Tenth Army Corps of the Third Field Army, was placed in charge of the preparation work.³²

On 25 June 1950, before the Chinese advisers' training was completed, the Korean War broke out. As the war quickly changed into an international crisis, with Washington announcing that it would rescue South Korea and dispatch the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait, Beijing's leaders were convinced of an overall American plot of aggression in the Far East, against China, Korea, and Vietnam.³³ Accordingly, Mao and the CCP leadership decided to push forward their support to the Viet Minh.³⁴

On 27 June, two days after the outbreak of the Korean War, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, and other top CCP leaders received the Chinese military advisers who were preparing to work in Vietnam. Stressing that supporting the Vietnamese Communists was the "glorious internationalist duty" of the Chinese revolutionaries, Mao assigned the advisers two major tasks: to help the Vietnamese organize and establish a formal army, and to assist them in planning and conducting major operations to defeat the French colonialists. Liu Shaoqi explained the reasons for the decision to support the Viet Minh. He emphasized that Vietnam was an important area and that sending Chinese military advisers there would have worldwide significance. If the Chinese failed to support the Vietnamese revolutionaries and allowed the enemy to stay, Liu stated, this would cause more difficulties for the Chinese.³⁵

Late in July, the CMAG, composed of seventy-nine experienced PLA officers, was formally established, with General Wei Guoqing as the head, associated with Generals Mei Jiasheng and Deng Yifan, both army-level commanders from the Third Field Army. To maintain secrecy, they were known publicly as the "Working Group in Southern China." Members of the group finally arrived in Vietnam in early August and began to serve with the Vietnamese Communist forces.³⁶

Chen Geng and the Border Campaign

As early as May 1950, the CCP leadership had decided to send Chen Geng—one of the most talented high-ranking commanders in the PLA, a member of the CCP Central Committee, and commander of the PLA's Twentieth Army Corps—to Vietnam to help organize a major military campaign along the

Vietnamese-Chinese border, so that the Viet Minh would be directly backed by the PRC.³⁷ Ho had suggested that Chen Geng be put in this position during his visit to China in early 1950 (Ho had known Chen Geng since the 1920s), and his idea was received with much enthusiasm by the CCP leadership.³⁸ On 18 June, Liu Shaoqi sent a telegram to Chen Geng, outlining his main tasks in Vietnam:

In addition to discussing and resolving some specific issues with the Vietnamese comrades, your primary task is to work out a generally practical plan based on Vietnam's conditions (including military establishments, politics, economy, topography, and transportation) and on the limits of our assistance (including, in particular, the conditions for shipping supplies). We will use this plan as a guide to implement various aid programs, including making a priority list of materials to be shipped, training cadres, training and rectifying troops, expanding recruits, organizing logistical work, and conducting battles. The plan should be practical, and it should be approved by the Vietnamese party Central Committee.³⁹

Chen traveled to the Viet Bac bases in mid-July. After a series of meetings with Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and other Viet Minh leaders, he suggested that in carrying out the Vietnamese-Chinese Border campaign the Viet Minh should "concentrate [its] forces and destroy the enemy troops by separating them," a principle that had proved effective for the Chinese Communists during China's civil war. Ho and the Vietnamese accepted Chen's plan.⁴⁰ On 22 July 1950, Chen reported by telegraph to the CCP Central Committee that he had reached a consensus with the Vietnamese leaders concerning the general strategy of the forthcoming Border campaign. They would first annihilate some automotive units of the enemy in mobile operations and destroy a few small enemy strongholds. This would allow the Vietnamese to gain experience, stimulate and consolidate the momentum of their soldiers, and win the initiative on the battlefield, so that they would be ready for large-scale operations. Then they would start an offensive against Cao Bang, a small town on the Vietnamese-Chinese border, by adopting a strategy of "besieging the enemy to annihilate its relief force": instead of attacking the town directly, they would surround it and sweep out the enemy's strongholds in the peripheral areas one by one, while attracting and destroying the enemy's reinforcements from Lang Son, and then seize Cao Bang. Chen believed that this strategy would guarantee the occupation of Cao Bang, "thus thoroughly changing the balance of power between the enemy and us in northeastern and northern Vietnam."⁴¹ The CMC approved Chen's plan in a telegram on 26 July,

instructing Chen "not to begin the campaign by directly attacking Cao Bang, but by attacking some of the enemy's small strongholds and then eliminating the enemy's reinforcements."⁴² To guarantee that Vietnamese units would fully follow Chen's strategy, Chinese military advisers, with Ho's approval, were assigned to the various battalion, regiment, and division headquarters of Vietnamese troops.⁴³

In order to strengthen the Viet Minh's combat capacity in the Border campaign, the Chinese also provided assistance with military equipment and other war materials. As early as the end of March 1950, Luo Guibo asked the CCP Central Committee for military equipment, ammunition, and communication equipment for 16,000 soldiers, to be used in military operations aimed at Cao Bang and Lao Cai.⁴⁴ From April to September 1950 the Chinese delivered to the Viet Minh more than 14,000 guns, 1,700 machine guns, about 150 pieces of different types of cannons, 2,800 tons of grain, and large amounts of ammunition, medicine, uniforms, and communication equipment.⁴⁵ In the meantime, the Viet Minh sent its troops to China's Yunnan province for training and reorganization by PLA officers.⁴⁶

The Border campaign started on 16 September. After forty-eight hours of fierce fighting, Viet Minh troops seized Dong Khe, a strategically important spot on Route Colonial Four, which linked Cao Bang with Vietnam's interior.⁴⁷ The French Command was surprised and dispatched a mobile army corps to Dong Khe while sending five battalions to attack Thai Nguyen, the location of the Viet Minh center. Chen judged that their real purpose was to rescue their isolated units in Cao Bang. So, instead of withdrawing troops from the Dong Khe-Cao Bang area to defend the Viet Minh center, he increased the pressure on Cao Bang. On 3 October, as he had predicted, French troops retreated from the Dong Khe-Cao Bang area and moved south, to fall into his trap in the nearby mountains. In Beijing, Mao Zedong paid close attention to the battles in the Vietnamese-Chinese border area. In response to Chen's report about the situation there, Mao dispatched a lengthy telegram on 6 October to give Chen clear instructions on how the final stage of the campaign should be fought:

It is correct for you to plan to first concentrate your main forces to eliminate the enemy troops southwest of Dong Khe whom we have now surrounded, and then, according to the situation, surround and annihilate the enemy troops escaping south from Cao Bang. If the enemy troops southwest of Dong Khe can be annihilated in a few days, the enemies from Cao Bang can be held, and the enemy reinforcements in Lang Son and other places will

not dare to come out, or we can use part of our troops to stop the enemy's reinforcements, defeat the enemies both in Cao Bang and in Dong Khe, and thus win two victories. So, you have to annihilate the enemy troops southwest of Dong Khe swiftly, resolutely, and thoroughly; your determination should not waver even in the face of heavy casualties (and you must anticipate that some cadres will start to waver). Meanwhile, you have to hold the enemies escaping from Cao Bang and make due preparations for the enemy reinforcements from Lang Son and other places. If you can properly solve these three problems, victory will be yours.⁴⁸

Chen shared Mao's instructions with Ho and other Vietnamese Communist leaders. They, in turn, ordered the Viet Minh troops to begin the final assault on 6 October. By 13 October, seven battalions of French troops, about 3,000 men, were defeated, and the French were forced to give up the blockade line along the Vietnamese-Chinese border, which they had held for years.⁴⁹ Chen Geng left Vietnam in early November 1950 to take new commanding responsibility in Korea.⁵⁰

Setbacks in 1951

The Viet Minh's victory in the Border campaign changed the balance of power on the Indochina battlefield. With the vast territory of the PRC backing them, Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communists were now in an unbeatable position. Encouraged by their new victory, Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of Viet Minh forces, and other Viet Minh military leaders, together with members of the CMAG, planned to lead the war to the Tonkin Delta area. They hoped that a series of victories against the weak links of the French defensive system on the Delta would create the conditions for a total Viet Minh victory in Indochina.⁵¹ Beijing's leaders and the CCP Central Committee endorsed the plan.⁵²

In the wake of the Border campaign, at almost the same time that the Viet Minh's new offensive was planned, major changes were being made to the French strategy in Indochina. General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny was appointed by the French government as high commissioner and commander in chief in Indochina. Immediately after his arrival in Saigon, he started a program to strengthen the French defensive system in the Delta area. By integrating into his defensive planning every means available, including the French air force, which was now using new American techniques, he ordered French soldiers to dig in to the last in defense of the Delta.⁵³ The Viet Minh's new offensive plan was now faced with a difficult French general.

From late December 1950 to June 1951, Viet Minh troops initiated three major offensive campaigns, respectively, in the Vinh Yen area, about twenty miles north of Hanoi (the Tran Huong Dao campaign), the Mao Khe area next to Hai Phong (the Hong Hoa Tham campaign), and the Ninh Binh area (the Quang Trung campaign). The Viet Minh high command used its best units, including the "iron division" (the 308th Division), in these operations, hoping that this "general counteroffensive" would bring the Vietnamese Communists closer to a final victory. In the face of firm French defense supported by superior artillery fire, however, Viet Minh forces suffered heavy casualties without making any significant strategic gains. General Giap had to give up plans for head-on attacks against fortified positions in the Red River delta area by mid-1951,⁵⁴ and the Viet Minh high command and the Chinese advisers working in Vietnam had to reconsider their whole strategy. Chinese advisers were now convinced that it was premature for Viet Minh forces to wage a "general counteroffensive" aimed at seizing the Delta area, and that they must instead shift the direction of their operations.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the French hoped to expand their victory. While continuing to consolidate their control over the Delta area, French troops began a counter-offensive against Hoa Binh, the key point in the Viet Minh's north-south line of communication. If the French were allowed to control this area, they would, among other things, occupy a favorable position to establish a corridor from Hai Phong through Hanoi and Hoa Binh to Son La, thus totally cutting off the connection between Viet Minh forces in the north and the south.⁵⁶

Facing this urgent situation, Giap asked advice from Luo Guibo and Deng Yifan (Wei Guoqing and Mei Jiasheng were then taking sick leave in China).⁵⁷ After asking for instructions of the CMC in Beijing, Deng suggested that the Viet Minh's forces cope with the French attack with medium- or small-scale mobile wars. Luo further proposed that Viet Minh troops not only focus on defending the Hoa Binh area, which they could not afford to lose, but also dispatch some units into the rear of the French-occupied zones to conduct guerrilla operations aimed at harassing the enemy and restoring guerrilla bases.⁵⁸ The Vietnamese Communist leadership carefully studied these suggestions and decided in late November to start an all-out effort aimed at repulsing the French offensive. They would deploy four divisions to defend the Hoa Binh area and send the 316th and 320th Divisions into areas behind the enemy's lines.⁵⁹ The Viet Minh's counteroffensive began in early December 1951. After three months of struggle, General Giap and his troops successfully turned away the French offensive, maintained their position in Hoa Binh, and strengthened their overall strategic status.

The Northwest Campaign

The Viet Minh's setbacks in 1951 convinced their Chinese military advisers of the necessity of leading the war into the enemy's rear by breaking up the weak link in the enemy's defensive system. Luo Guibo, who was then also in charge of the CMAG during General Wei Guoqing's sick leave,⁶⁰ recommended that the Viet Minh consider bringing the war to Vietnam's northwestern region adjacent to Laos, so that the overall military situation in Indochina could be turned to the Viet Minh's favor.⁶¹

Early in 1952, after several months investigating the situation on the battlefield, the CMAG sent two reports, "A Study of the Conditions between the Enemy and Us in Northern Vietnam and Our Tasks and Policy Lines in the Future" and "Tasks and Policy Lines for 1952," to the Vietnamese, proposing to start a new campaign—the Northwest campaign. Chinese advisers believed that this effort would further consolidate the Viet Minh's liberation zone in northwestern Vietnam and form the basis for a general strategic counteroffensive in the future.⁶² On 16 February 1952, the CMAG proposed to the Viet Minh high command that for 1952 they focus on guerrilla tactics and small-scale mobile wars so that their main formations could go through political and military training in preparation for combat in the Northwest.⁶³ The same day, Luo Guibo stated in a report to the CMC that in the first half of 1952 Viet Minh troops would focus on reorganization and training; in the second half of 1952 they would try to eliminate enemies in Son La, Lai Chau, and Nghia Lo, all in northwestern Vietnam, and consolidate their control of these areas; and then in 1953, they would establish bases in northwestern Vietnam from which to initiate operations in upper Laos.⁶⁴ This plan was quickly approved by Chinese leaders in Beijing. Liu Shaoqi commented that "it is very important to liberate Laos."⁶⁵ The Vietnamese Communists also gave their approval. On 18 March, the Viet Minh high command decided to include the organization of the Northwest campaign as one of its three major tasks of 1952 (the other two being conducting political rectification of Viet Minh troops and leading guerrilla operations into the rear of the enemy). In April 1952, the VWP politburo formally decided to initiate the Northwest campaign, and Chinese military advisers were authorized by Ho himself to command it.⁶⁶

On 14 April, Luo sent a telegram to Beijing, reporting on the CMAG's initial plan for the Northwest campaign. Offensive operations in the northwestern provinces would begin in mid-September. Viet Minh troops would first attack Nghia Lo, the northwestern province closest to the Viet Minh's Viet Bac bases, and then march toward Son La. After the liberation of most of the Northwest region in 1952, Viet Minh troops would attack Lai Chau in 1953. Beijing's

leaders approved Luo's plan in a telegram to him on 19 April. Anticipating fierce fighting in seizing Nghia Lo, they stressed the importance of making proper preparations before the start of the campaign.⁶⁷

Luo and Mei Jiasheng, then deputy head of the CMAG, further analyzed the military situation in the Northwest and sent a telegram to Beijing on 11 July, suggesting that the Northwest campaign be conducted in two stages. In the first, the Viet Minh would use two divisions to seize Nghia Lo and at the same time annihilate the enemy's paratroopers, if they were used as reinforcements. In the second stage, three regiments would be dispatched to enter Son La, while the other three regiments, together with another two regiments in Phu Tho, would march toward Lai Chau. Viet Minh troops, Luo and Mei believed, would thus be able to occupy Vietnam's entire northwestern territory by the end of 1952. Responding to the requests of the Vietnamese, they also asked Beijing to send Chinese troops in Yunnan province to take part in the attack on Lai Chau.⁶⁸

On 22 July, the CCP Central Committee replied that it was impossible for China to send troops directly into the fighting in Vietnam, and that this had long been an established principle. Chinese troops, however, could be deployed along the Chinese-Vietnamese border, in the Hekou and Jinping areas in Yunnan province. The telegram also instructed Chinese military advisers to adopt the strategies of "concentrating our own forces" and "the easiest first and the most difficult last" by seizing Nghia Lo province before considering occupying the entire Northwest. Beijing's leaders reminded the Chinese advisers that Viet Minh troops lacked the experience of offensive operations and asked the CMAG and the Viet Minh high command not to pursue a total victory in the Northwest by the end of 1952 but to prepare for a protracted war.⁶⁹ In early September, the VWP politburo decided to conduct the Northwest campaign following these suggestions.⁷⁰

In late September, Ho Chi Minh secretly visited Beijing, where he and the CCP leaders reached a consensus on the overall strategy for the next stage: the Viet Minh's forces would first direct their main attention to the Northwest (including northwestern Vietnam and upper Laos), then march southward from upper Laos to push for the Red River delta. Meanwhile, in terms of the concrete plan of the campaign, following the suggestions of CCP leaders, and Mao Zedong's and Peng Dehuai's in particular, Chinese and Vietnamese military planners decided to concentrate on Nghia Lo. After seizing Nghia Lo, Viet Minh troops would not attack Son La immediately but focus on establishing revolutionary bases around Nghia Lo and constructing a highway linking Nghia Lo with Yen Bay. General Giap may have had different opinions about

the narrowing down of the campaign goals, but the Chinese emphasized the importance of winning a steady victory, and Giap finally yielded.⁷¹ Wei Guoqing, after almost a year's sick leave, returned to his post in mid-October to participate in commanding the campaign.

The Northwest campaign began on 14 October 1952. The Viet Minh high command concentrated eight regiments in attacking French strongholds in Nghia Lo. In ten days, they annihilated most enemy bases and, after a short period of readjustment, continued to attack the French in Son La and Lai Chau. By early December 1952, Nghia Lo, Son La, southern Lai Chau, and western Yen Bay, all in northwestern Vietnam, had been liberated by Vietnamese Communists.⁷²

After the victory, the VWP Central Committee, having consulted with the CCP leadership several times, decided in February 1953 to move farther to the west by organizing the Xam Neua campaign in upper Laos. The purpose would be to connect the "liberation zone" in northwestern Vietnam with Communist occupied areas in northern Laos, thus placing greater pressure on the French.⁷³ On 23 March 1953, Wei Guoqing and Mei Jiasheng led some members of the CMAG to Laos to organize the campaign, which began in late March and lasted until early May. According to Chinese statistics, the Viet Minh's troops annihilated three battalions and eleven companies, seizing control of the entire Xam Neua province and part of Xiang Khoary and Phong Sali provinces.⁷⁴ The Viet Minh's bases in northwestern Vietnam were now linked with these areas in upper Laos, further enhancing the Communists' military position.

The Path toward Dien Bien Phu

By the summer of 1953, the confrontation between Vietnamese Communists and the French on the Indochina battlefield had changed dramatically: the Viet Minh's gains in the past two years put the Vietnamese Communists in a position to pursue other victories aimed at establishing an overriding superiority in the war. Meanwhile, the end of the Korean conflict in July 1953 meant that the Chinese were able to give more attention to their southern neighbor. It was within this framework that the VWP leadership and the CMAG began to formulate military plans for the fall and winter of 1953 and spring of 1954.

The French were also making changes. In the face of a series of setbacks under the pressure of Viet Minh offensives in northwestern Vietnam and upper Laos, in May 1953 General Henri Navarre replaced General Raoul Salan (who had succeeded General Lattre de Tassigny in 1952) as the commander of French forces in Indochina. Supported by the United States, Navarre adopted a new three-year strategy aimed at winning back the advantage on the battle-

field. He divided Indochina into northern and southern theaters along the 18th parallel and planned to eliminate Viet Minh guerrillas in southern and south central Vietnam by spring 1954, and then, by spring 1955, to concentrate the main formation of French forces to fight a decisive battle with the Communist forces in the Red River delta.⁷⁵ To carry out this plan, the French began to send additional troops to Indochina. The United States, released from its heavy burden in Korea and worried about the serious consequences of a French loss in Indochina, dramatically increased its military and financial support to France (by an additional \$400 million) in order to check "Communist expansion" in another key part of East Asia.⁷⁶

Facing this potentially disastrous scenario, the vwp Central Committee asked the ccp Central Committee on 13 August 1953 "to help offer opinions" concerning "the understanding of the current situation as well as strategies for operations in the future."⁷⁷ The vwp politburo, following Giap's initiative, decided on 22 August to transfer the focus of Viet Minh's future operations from the mountainous northwestern area to the Red River delta. The former area would remain on the Viet Minh's operation agenda but no longer as a priority. Luo Guibo attended the meeting of the vwp politburo and reported this strategic change to Beijing.⁷⁸

The ccp leadership immediately discussed Luo's report and sent two urgent messages to Luo and the vwp Central Committee on 27 and 29 August, opposing the change of strategic emphasis and insisting that the original plan of focusing on the northwestern battlefield be continued. In the 29 August telegram the ccp Central Committee stated:

We should first annihilate enemies in the Lai Chau area, liberating northern and central Laos, and then extend the battlefield gradually toward southern Laos and Cambodia, thus putting pressure on Saigon. By adopting this strategy, we will be able to limit the human and financial resources of the enemy and separate the enemy's troops, leaving the enemy in a disadvantageous position. . . . The realization of this strategic plan will surely contribute to the final defeat of the colonial rule of French imperialists in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Of course, we need to overcome a variety of difficulties and prepare for a prolonged war.⁷⁹

The vwp politburo again met in September to discuss the message from Beijing. Ho favored the opinions provided by the Chinese, and the vwp politburo, after much debate, decided that the strategic emphasis of the Viet Minh's operations would be kept in the northwestern area.⁸⁰ On 10 October, the ccp Central Committee informed the vwp Central Committee that Wei Guoqing

had been appointed as the general military adviser and Luo Guibo the general political adviser, representing the ccp in all military and political decision making in the future.⁸¹ Wei came back to Beijing to report personally on the situation in Indochina to the ccp Central Committee. Mao received him and emphasized again that the Viet Minh should continue to treat the northwestern area as the emphasis of its military operations.⁸²

In late October and early November 1953, Wei and the Viet Minh high command worked out the operation plans for winter 1953 and spring 1954. According to this plan, Vietnamese Communist forces would continue to focus on operations in Lai Chau, and would try to seize the entire Lai Chau province in January 1954; then, they would attack various French strongholds in upper and central Laos. At the same time, Viet Minh troops would also march from the mountainous areas in central Vietnam toward Laos, making lower Laos the target of attacks from two directions. The vwp politburo approved this plan on 3 November 1953.⁸³ Beginning in the middle of that month, five regiments of Viet Minh forces headed toward Lai Chau.

When General Navarre received intelligence reports about the Viet Minh troops' new movement, he, following the spirit of his original plan, decided on 20 November to drop six parachute battalions to Dien Bien Phu, a strategically important village located in Vietnam's northwestern mountains. If the French troops controlled Dien Bien Phu, Navarre believed, they would be able to prevent the Communists from occupying the entire northwestern region and attacking upper Laos. Dien Bien Phu would also form a "launching point" for offensives to destroy Viet Minh forces. The French quickly reinforced their troops at Dien Bien Phu, constructed airstrips, and started building defensive works, making this little-known village a real fortification. Dien Bien Phu was quickly changed into the focus of the whole Indochina battlefield.

On his way from Viet Bac to the northwestern area, Wei Guoqing learned that French paratroopers had landed at Dien Bien Phu. After consulting other Chinese advisers, Wei suggested to Beijing's leaders that the Viet Minh start a major campaign to surround French forces in Dien Bien Phu while still sticking to the original plan of attacking Lai Chau.⁸⁴ Beijing approved Wei's plan and instructed him to convey these ideas to the Viet Minh high command. Beijing's leaders particularly stressed that in addition to its military and political importance, a victory by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu could have enormous impact on the development of the international situation.⁸⁵

Beijing's emphasis on the international significance of the Dien Bien Phu campaign should be understood in the context of the Communists' new general strategy that took shape in late 1953 and early 1954. With the end of

the Korean War, the Communist world launched a "peace offensive" in late 1953. On 26 September, the Soviet Union proposed in a note to the French, British, and American governments that a five-power conference (including China) should be convened to discuss ways of easing international tensions. On 8 October, Zhou Enlai issued a statement supporting the Soviet proposal and followed with another two months later, on 9 January 1954, asserting that international tensions in Asia needed to be resolved through direct consultations by the big powers.⁸⁶ The Berlin four-power conference at the end of January finally endorsed the Soviet-initiated plan to convene an international conference at Geneva to discuss the restoration of peace in Korea and Indochina.⁸⁷ A victory at Dien Bien Phu would greatly enhance the Communist position at the forthcoming conference.

The Viet Minh high command responded favorably to the CMAG's Dien Bien Phu campaign proposal. The VWP Central Committee decided on 6 December to start the campaign, and a front-line headquarters, with General Giap as the commander in chief and Wei Guoqing as the top Chinese military adviser, was established.⁸⁸ The same day, Ho Chi Minh called on the whole Vietnamese party, people, and army "to use every effort to ensure the success of the campaign."⁸⁹ Thousands of peasants had been mobilized to build roads and carry artillery pieces and ammunition over impassable mountains. From mid-December Viet Minh troops gradually positioned themselves in the areas around Dien Bien Phu to encircle the French forces. In response, General Navarre sent more troops. By the end of 1953, sixteen battalions of French troops were deployed at Dien Bien Phu.

The Chinese advisers nevertheless firmly believed that the Viet Minh's campaign efforts in Dien Bien Phu should continue, and they received full support from top leaders in Beijing. On 24 January 1954, the CMC gave Wei Guoqing instructions on the strategy for the Dien Bien Phu siege: "While attacking Dien Bien Phu, you should avoid making assaults of equal strength from all directions; rather, you need to adopt the strategy of separating and encircling the enemy, and annihilate them bit by bit."⁹⁰ Through a series of discussions with Chinese advisers, the Viet Minh high command decided to accept and adopt the strategies as proposed by the CCP leaders in Beijing.

In order to enhance the Viet Minh's offensive strength, Beijing's leaders ordered the acceleration of China's military delivery and other support to the Viet Minh. To cut off Dien Bien Phu from French airborne support, China sent back to Vietnam four Vietnamese antiaircraft battalions that had been receiving training in China.⁹¹ During the months of the Dien Bien Phu campaign, more than 200 trucks, over 10,000 barrels of oil, over 100 cannons,

3,000 pieces of various types of guns, around 2,400,000 gun bullets, over 60,000 artillery shells, and about 1,700 tons of grain were rushed to Viet Minh troops.⁹²

By March 1954, Vietnamese Communist troops had surrounded Dien Bien Phu for three months. The Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina was scheduled for April, so Zhou Enlai instructed Chinese advisers in Vietnam: "In order to achieve a victory in the diplomatic field, you may need to consider whether you will be able to follow our experiences on the eve of the Korean armistice and win several battles in Vietnam."⁹³ Chinese military advisers consulted with the Viet Minh high command, which decided to start the offensive in Dien Bien Phu in mid-March.

On 13 March Communist forces began to attack French positions in the northern part of Dien Bien Phu. By 17 March, they had overrun three strongholds there and temporarily knocked out two French airstrips. The French, suddenly realizing that "the stronghold of Dien Bien Phu was a deadly trap,"⁹⁴ rushed another three battalions into the area. In the meantime, France's chief of staff, General Paul Ely, who was visiting Washington, asked for a more active American involvement in Indochina.⁹⁵ But the Communist offensive went ahead. On 30 March Communist forces attacked the central part of Dien Bien Phu, where the French frontal command was located. When their advance was slowed by strong French defensive barriers, Beijing's leaders, after receiving reports from Chinese advisers in Vietnam, summoned several engineering experts from the Chinese volunteers in Korea to teach the Vietnamese how to dig trenches and underground tunnels.⁹⁶

Mao Zedong was eager for the Viet Minh to win an overriding victory in Dien Bien Phu, and thus to lay the foundation for a future victory in northern Vietnam. In a letter dated 3 April 1954 to Peng Dehuai, vice chairman of the CMC in charge of its daily affairs and former commander in chief of Chinese forces in Korea, Mao stated that the Vietnamese needed to form four additional artillery regiments and two new engineering regiments, which should complete training in six months. If the Chinese did not have enough cannons to equip these new Vietnamese units, Mao suggested, they could transfer the equipment from their own units to the Vietnamese. Also, Mao continued, the Chinese should supply the Vietnamese with instructors and advisers selected from among the Chinese troops who had fought in Korea, including some division and army-level officers. The best training site for these units would be in Vietnam, but somewhere in the Guangxi province would also be acceptable. Six months was a short time to execute this plan, Mao acknowledged, so he asked Peng, along with the General Staff and Artillery Command of the PLA,

to contact the Viet Minh immediately to seek an agreement. Mao believed that with these new artillery units, together with another artillery division already under the command of the Viet Minh, and by amassing five infantry divisions, the Vietnamese would be able to launch direct attacks against Hanoi and Hai Phong. Mao asked Peng immediately to start preparing a sufficient supply of artillery shells and engineering equipment for these units while offering more antiaircraft guns to the Viet Minh. Concerning the current fighting in Dien Bien Phu, Mao stressed: "Dien Bien Phu should be conquered resolutely, and, if things go smoothly and success is certain, the final attack [against Dien Bien Phu] should begin ahead of schedule." In addition, Mao mentioned that the Viet Minh, after their victory in Dien Bien Phu, should quickly mobilize 5,000–8,000 new soldiers to supplement their forces and prepare to attack Hanoi no later than early 1955.⁹⁷

When the Viet Minh's assaults at Dien Bien Phu encountered tough French resistance, the CMC telegraphed Wei Guoqing twice on 9 April, promising him that a sufficient supply of artillery ammunition would be guaranteed to the Vietnamese so that they could use as many artillery shells as they wanted. The CMC also instructed Wei to adopt the following strategies in attacking Dien Bien Phu: cut off the enemy's front by attacking in the middle; destroy the enemy's underground defenses one section at a time by using concentrated artillery fire; consolidate your position immediately after seizing even a small portion of ground, thus continuously tightening the encirclement of the enemy; use snipers widely to restrict the enemy's activities; and use political propaganda against the enemy.⁹⁸ In addition, on 17 April, Mao Zedong instructed PLA deputy chiefs of staff Huang Kecheng and Su Yu, "Considering the possibility that a cease-fire might be reached in Vietnam, the training of the new [Vietnamese] artillery divisions should not be conducted in China, and artillery pieces should be transported to Vietnam at the earliest possible time."⁹⁹

By late April, under the fierce offensive of the Communist forces, French troops in Dien Bien Phu were confined to a small area of less than two square kilometers, with half their airstrips occupied by the Communists. At this stage the United States threatened to interfere. In a speech to the Overseas Press Club of America on 29 March, John Foster Dulles, the American secretary of state, issued a powerful warning that the United States would tolerate no Communist gain in Indochina and called for a "united action" on the part of Western countries to stop it.¹⁰⁰ One week later, President Dwight Eisenhower invoked the "falling domino" theory to express the necessity of a joint military operation against Communist expansion in Indochina.¹⁰¹ Policymakers in

Washington even considered the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons to stop a Communist victory in Dien Bien Phu.¹⁰²

Without the support of either U.S. Congress or the Allies, the Americans probably were not ready to intervene in the Indochina War in 1954. The threat of direct intervention was primarily used for diplomatic reasons during the Dien Bien Phu crisis and at the Geneva Conference.¹⁰³ As will be seen, this tactic eventually worked, though in a complicated way. But it did not save the remaining French resistance in Dien Bien Phu. Chinese advisers in Vietnam insisted on continuing the campaign efforts. Wei Guoqing believed that the American warning was just an empty threat to make the Vietnamese Communists give up the current offensive. Since the Vietnamese had achieved a superior position in the battlefield, Wei stressed, they should not yield to the American threat and lose this opportunity.¹⁰⁴ The VWP politburo, after carefully weighing the arguments, decided on 19 April to commence the final offensive in early May.¹⁰⁵ To facilitate the move, the Chinese transferred a large amount of military equipment and ammunition to the Vietnamese. Two Chinese-trained Vietnamese battalions, equipped with 75 mm recoilless guns and six-barrel rocket launchers, arrived at Dien Bien Phu on the eve of the final assault. Beijing's leaders emphasized to the Chinese advisers in Vietnam: "To eliminate the enemy totally and to win the final victory in the campaign, you should use overwhelming artillery fire. Do not save artillery shells. We will supply and deliver sufficient shells to you."¹⁰⁶

To guarantee the final victory in the campaign, top CCP leaders carefully considered every possible contingency that might endanger a total Viet Minh victory. On 28 April, Mao Zedong instructed Peng Dehuai and Huang Kecheng to guard against the possibility of a French paratrooper landing at the rear of the Vietnamese, which would cut off their supply line. Mao emphasized that this should be taken as the "most possible danger," which, if it occurred, could force the Vietnamese to give up the campaign. Mao instructed Peng and Huang to "ask the Vietnamese to deploy immediately more troops in proper areas" so that the French parachute landing could be prevented.¹⁰⁷ On 30 April, the CMC, following Mao's instruction, directed Wei Guoqing to consult with the Vietnamese to take preemptive measures against such an attack. On 3 May, General Su Yu, then the Chinese chief of staff, again contacted General Wei, reiterating the importance of preventing a French airborne landing.¹⁰⁸

The final offensive of the Communist forces at Dien Bien Phu began on the evening of 5 May. The newly arrived Chinese rocket launchers played an important role by destroying the French defenses in minutes. By the afternoon of 7 May, French troops had neither the ability nor the will to fight and

announced surrender. The Dien Bien Phu campaign ended with a glorious victory for the Vietnamese Communists.

The Geneva Conference of 1954

As has happened on many other occasions in history, the First Indochina War was fought on the battlefield but concluded at the negotiation table. On 8 May, the day after the end of the Dien Bien Phu campaign, the Geneva Conference, which had started on 26 April, began its discussion of the Indochina problem. It was at this moment of victory, ironically, that sharp divergences emerged between the Vietnamese and Chinese Communists. Evidence shows that the CCP leaders' view of Indochina was strongly influenced by Washington's warning of direct American intervention there. This development, in turn, caused the Chinese Communists and their Vietnamese comrades to disagree.

In retrospect, the close relationship between the Chinese Communists and their Vietnamese comrades offers no support to the theory of a monolithic international Communist movement. Even at the height of cooperation between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists, there were signs of contradictions and, in some cases, conflicts between them. Chinese advisers complained that the quality of Viet Minh troops was too poor to realize some of their strategic designs. General Chen Geng mentioned in his diary that General Giap and some other Vietnamese Communists lacked "Bolshevik-style self-criticism" and were unhappy with the Chinese criticism of their "shortcomings." On one occasion, Chen even described Giap as "slippery and not very upright and honest" in his relationship with his Chinese comrades.¹⁰⁹ The Vietnamese, on the other hand, were not satisfied with some of the Chinese advisers' suggestions, especially those concerning land reforms and political indoctrination following China's experiences. The Vietnamese discontent was shown most explicitly in the 1979 official review of Vietnamese-Chinese relations, where, in recalling history, the Chinese were called "traitors" even during the First Indochina War.¹¹⁰ Seeing signs of Chinese-Vietnamese friction, the CCP leadership stressed in several telegrams to Chinese advisers in Vietnam that they should avoid "imposing their own opinions on Vietnamese comrades."¹¹¹ Indeed, the Chinese did not feel comfortable dealing with the Vietnamese, a people who had struggled against Chinese control for centuries and who had so vigorous a nationalist tendency.

With victory in sight, the disagreements between the Chinese and the Vietnamese surfaced, focusing on the final settlement of the Indochina problem. While the Vietnamese hoped for a solution that would leave clear Communist



The Chinese delegation attending the Geneva conference of 1954. At the center table (from right to left) are Zhang Wentian, Wang Bingnan, Shi Zhe, and Zhou Enlai. Photo courtesy Shi Zhe personal collection.

domination not only in Vietnam but also in Laos and Cambodia, the Chinese, supported by the Soviet Union, were eager to reach a compromise, if necessary, by temporarily dividing Vietnam into two zones.¹¹²

Beijing's attitude toward the Geneva Conference reflected several of its leaders' basic considerations at the moment. First of all, with the end of the Korean War, Beijing's leaders sensed the need to devote more of the nation's resources to domestic issues. In 1953 and 1954, they were contemplating the introduction of the first five-year plan, as well as the liberation of Nationalist-controlled Taiwan, either in peaceful ways, or if necessary, by military means. After five years of sharp confrontation with the United States and the West, many leaders in Beijing perceived that China needed a stable outside environment. They thus did not want to see the continued escalation of the conflict in Indochina. Second, with insights gained from their Korean War experience, Beijing's leaders saw in the wake of the Dien Bien Phu siege the possibility of direct American military intervention. They approached this problem with a "worst-case assumption": they would try everything possible, including pursuing a compromise at Geneva, to prevent American intervention; only if the Americans directly entered the war in Indochina would they consider sending troops to stop American forces from approaching China's borders while

maintaining the momentum of the Vietnamese revolution.¹¹³ Third, Beijing's leaders also believed that a reconciliatory Chinese approach at the Geneva Conference would help strengthen Beijing's new claim to peaceful coexistence as the foundation of the PRC's international policy and create opportunities for "breaking up the American blockade and embargo" against the PRC.¹¹⁴

Beijing's considerations were consistent with a central concern of the leaders in Moscow, who, after Stalin's death, also needed to focus on domestic issues and avoid a confrontation with the West in Asia. In the first three weeks of April, Zhou Enlai visited the Soviet Union two times to discuss the Chinese-Soviet strategy at the Geneva Conference. According to the recollections of Shi Zhe, who was Zhou's interpreter during these visits, the Chinese and the Soviets agreed to cooperate with each other at the forthcoming conference. Zhou's views seemed to have been greatly influenced by those of Vyacheslav Molotov. In his meeting with Zhou, Molotov stressed that it was possible for the Geneva Conference to solve one or two problems, but the imperialist countries would certainly look out for their own interests. So the Communist camp should adopt a realistic strategy that would be compatible with this situation. Since this was the first time the Chinese had attended an important international conference, Zhou made it clear that they would try their best to cooperate with the Soviets.¹¹⁵ These discussions resulted in a consensus: although the imperialist countries, and the United States in particular, would try to sabotage the conference, if the Communist side adopted a realistic strategy, then it was still possible that a peaceful solution of the Indochina problem could be worked out.¹¹⁶

The Vietnamese Communist leaders, according to Chinese sources, originally posed no apparent opposition to Beijing's view. From late March to April 1954, Ho Chi Minh, the DRV's president, and Pham Van Dong, the DRV's premier and foreign minister, led a Vietnamese delegation to visit Beijing, which then, accompanied by Zhou Enlai, visited Moscow. In discussions with the delegation, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhou Enlai spoke about in particular China's experience gained from the negotiations to end the Korean War, emphasizing that it was necessary to maintain "realistic expectations" for the Geneva Conference. According to Chinese sources, the Vietnamese leaders agreed.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, the victory at Dien Bien Phu made the Vietnamese believe that they were in a position to squeeze more concessions from their adversaries at the conference table. Pham Van Dong, head of the DRV delegation, announced at the conference that the Indochina problem would be settled if, first, the Viet Minh were to establish virtual control of most parts of Vietnam

(through an on-the-spot truce, followed by a national plebiscite, which they knew they would win), and, second, if it were to pursue positions for Communist forces in Laos and Cambodia (by treating the settlement of the Laos and Cambodian problems as part of a general settlement of the Indochina problem).¹¹⁸

Behind the scenes of the Geneva Conference, Dong's unyielding approach caused subtle tensions in the relations between the Chinese and the Soviets, on the one side, and the Vietnamese Communists, on the other. In several discussions among the Chinese, Soviet, and Vietnamese delegations, Zhou Enlai pointed out that Dong's attitude reflected how the inexperienced Vietnamese had been out of touch with reality. In justifying his willingness to accept the solution of temporarily dividing Vietnam into two areas, with the north belonging to the Communists and the south to the French and pro-French Vietnamese, and to wait for a national plebiscite, Zhou emphasized that this would allow the Viet Minh to control the entire north and gain back the south after the vote. On the Laos and Cambodia problems, Zhou favored a separate solution, which, he believed, would simplify the whole issue and make the total settlement of the Indochina problem possible.¹¹⁹ Zhou's stand was fully backed by Mao and the other CCP leaders in Beijing. In order not to jeopardize the prospect of reaching an agreement at Geneva, on 20 June Mao instructed the CMAG not to expand military operations in Vietnam throughout July.¹²⁰ However, Dong was not ready to accept the Chinese arguments.

American policymakers believed the United States had important strategic interests in Southeast Asia and did not want to see the Geneva Conference reach a compromise. Dulles, the head of the American delegation, followed a line of blocking any Communist initiative at the conference. He truly believed that an inconclusive result was better than any agreement that would provide the Communists with even minimal gains.¹²¹ Dulles's uncompromising stand was matched by Dong's, leading the conference to a deadlock by mid-June.

At this moment a major political change occurred in France: the French parliament, reflecting the public's impatience with the immobility at Geneva, ousted Prime Minister Joseph Laniel and replaced him with Pierre Mendès-France, who, as a longtime leading critic of the war in Indochina, promised that if he did not lead the negotiation to a successful conclusion by 20 July, he would resign. Zhou seized the opportunity to push negotiations at Geneva forward. On 15 June, the Chinese, Soviet, and Vietnamese delegations held a crucial meeting. Zhou pointed out that the key to the deadlock of the conference lay in the Vietnamese refusal to admit the existence of their forces in Laos and Cambodia. He warned that this attitude would render the negotiations

on Indochina fruitless, and that the Vietnamese Communists would also lose an opportunity to achieve a peaceful solution of the Vietnam problem. Zhou proposed that the Communist camp adopt a new line in favor of withdrawal of all foreign forces from Laos and Cambodia, including those of the Viet Minh. The Soviets strongly supported Zhou's proposal, and the Vietnamese, under heavy pressure from the Chinese and the Soviets, finally yielded.¹²² On 16 and 17 June, Zhou communicated the change of Communist attitude toward Laos and Cambodia to the French and the British.¹²³ In late June, in order to prepare for further discussions on the Indochina problem, the foreign ministers agreed to adjourn for three weeks.

From 3 to 5 July in Liuzhou, a city located in Guangxi province close to the Chinese-Vietnamese border, Ho Chi Minh, accompanied by Vo Nguyen Giap and Hoang Van Hoan, visited China and met Zhou Enlai to coordinate their strategies.¹²⁴ Zhou particularly emphasized the danger involved in a possible direct American intervention in Indochina, arguing that it would greatly complicate the situation there and undermine the Viet Minh's achievements. He thus convinced Ho that it was in the interests of the Vietnamese Communists to reach an agreement with the French at Geneva. The two sides reached a consensus on strategies for the next phase of the conference: on the Vietnam problem, they would favor dividing the country temporarily along the 16th parallel, but since Route Colonial Nine, the only line of transport linking Laos to the seaport, was located north of the 16th parallel, they would be willing to accept some slight adjustment of this resolution; on the Laos problem, they would try to establish Xam Neua and Phong Sali, two provinces adjacent to China, as the concentration zone for pro-Communist Laos forces; on the Cambodia problem, they would allow a political settlement that would probably lead to the establishment of a non-Communist government there.¹²⁵

When Ho returned to Vietnam, the vwp Central Committee issued an instruction on 5 July (known as the "5 July Document") that reflected the agreements Ho had reached with Zhou at Liuzhou.¹²⁶ In mid-July, the vwp Central Committee held its sixth meeting. Ho endorsed the new strategy of solving the Indochina problem through a cease-fire based on temporarily dividing Vietnam into two areas, which would supposedly lead to the unification of the whole country after the withdrawal of French forces and through a nationwide plebiscite. It is notable that Ho criticized the "leftist tendency" among party members who ignored the danger of American intervention and paid no attention to the importance of struggles at international conferences.¹²⁷ Ho's comments, and especially his stress on the danger of American intervention, clearly reflected Zhou's influence.

In Beijing, the CCP politburo held an enlarged meeting on 7 July to hear Zhou Enlai's report on the Geneva Conference and the Liuzhou meeting. Zhou reported that the Chinese delegation had adopted a policy line of uniting with France, Britain, southeast Asian countries, and the three Indochina countries—that is, uniting with all international forces that could be united, in order to isolate the United States and to contain and break up the U.S. imperialist plan of expanding America's hegemony in the world. The central part of this policy line, emphasized Zhou, lay in achieving a peaceful settlement of the Indochina problem. Zhou believed that, judging from the progress that had been made at the Geneva Conference thus far, the settlement could be reached. Mao praised and approved Zhou's report.¹²⁸


The foreign ministers' meeting at Geneva resumed on 12 July. Zhou found that Pham Van Dong was still reluctant to accept the new negotiation line. In an overnight meeting with Dong to try to persuade him of the necessity of reaching a compromise, Zhou used America's intervention in the Korean War as an example to emphasize the tremendous danger involved in direct American military intervention in Indochina. Zhou promised, "[W]ith the final withdrawal of the French, all of Vietnam will be yours." Dong finally yielded—probably to Zhou's logic, if not to Zhou's pressure.¹²⁹

Zhou dominated the final stage of the Geneva Conference. Mendès-France insisted that the 17th parallel be the final line of his concession, and that if it was not acceptable, he would have to resign. Zhou made the decision to change the Communist demand from the 16th parallel to the 17th to meet the French prime minister's stand, and he persuaded the Soviets and the Vietnamese in particular to accept this change.¹³⁰ The Geneva Conference reached a settlement on the Indochina problem in the early morning of 21 July, before Mendès-France's deadline officially expired.¹³¹

The real winner at the conference was Zhou. He left Geneva with nearly everything he could have anticipated. The creation of a Communist-ruled North Vietnam would serve as a buffer zone between Communist China and the capitalist world in Southeast Asia (and in this respect, the difference between the 16th and the 17th parallels did not matter to China). The opening of new dialogue between China and Western powers such as France and Great Britain would help break the PRC's isolated status in the world; and, much more important, the crucial role China played at the conference implied that for the first time in modern history (since the 1839–42 Opium War) China had been accepted by the international society—friends and foes alike—as a real world power.

The Geneva agreement of 1954 ended the First Indochina War, but the con-

frontation in this region was far from over. Only two years later, when the United States and the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in Saigon broke the agreement about the national plebiscite in Vietnam, the road to the Second Indochina War was paved; the war would last until the mid-1970s. More surprisingly—and ironically—Communist China and a unified Communist Vietnam would enter the Third Indochina War in 1979 as adversaries. The origin of the confrontation between them, however, can be traced back to their cooperation during the years of the First Indochina War.



CHAPTER 6 BEIJING AND THE POLISH AND HUNGARIAN CRISES OF 1956

There is fire in Poland, and there is fire in Hungary. Since the fire is there, it will blaze up sooner or later. Which is better, to let the fire blaze, or not to let it? Fire cannot be wrapped up in paper. Now the fires have blazed up; that's just fine, as many reactionaries in Hungary have been exposed. The Hungarian incident has educated the Hungarian people and at the same time some Soviet comrades as well as us Chinese comrades.

—Mao Zedong

In retrospect, the Polish and Hungarian crises of 1956 stand together as a landmark in the development of the Cold War history. These two important events not only revealed the long-existing tensions within the Soviet bloc, especially between the Soviet Union and Poland and the Soviet Union and Hungary; they also triggered a series of more general confrontations within the Communist world, eventually leading to the decline of international communism as a twentieth-century phenomenon.

The international nature of the Polish and Hungarian crises is clearly indicated in their connections with Beijing. The crises erupted at a time when serious disagreements had begun to surface between the Chinese and Soviet leadership in the wake of Stalin's death and the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization effort.¹ Beijing's response to the crises epitomized Mao Zedong's perception of Beijing's and Moscow's changing positions in the world proletarian revolution, revealing his intention to adopt a more aggressive agenda on promoting China's "socialist revolution and reconstruction." Consequently, while both the peaceful settlement of the Polish crisis and the tragic result of the Hungarian revolution reflected the CCP's increasing influence in the international Communist movement, Beijing's experience during these two events enhanced Mao's determination to bring China's continuous revolution to a more radical phase. As a result, disastrous events such

as the Anti-Rightist movement and the Great Leap Forward in 1957-58 took place, which created conditions for deeper splits to develop between Beijing and Moscow. This chapter uses Chinese source materials made available in recent years, reinforced by Russian, Polish, and Hungarian documents, to discuss Beijing's involvement in the Polish and Hungarian crises of 1956.

The Polish Crisis

In October 1956, months of accumulated tensions and a workers' uprising in Poznan resulted in the election of a new politburo of the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) excluding pro-Soviet, Stalinist leaders. The new PUWP leadership headed by Wladyslaw Gomulka also planned to remove Marshal Konstantin Rokossovskii, a Russian who had held the position as Poland's defense minister since 1949. In order to put pressure on the Polish leadership and to control the situation in Warsaw, a high-ranking Soviet delegation headed by Khrushchev rushed to Warsaw on 19 October.²

From the beginning, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders watched the crisis emerging in Poland alertly. In accordance with their understanding of the function of the "people's democratic dictatorship," they did not regard mass revolt as a legitimate way to solve the problems existing between the Communist state and a Communist-controlled society.³ But, comparing the situation in Poland to their own past experience of having to behave as Moscow's junior partner, Mao and his comrades believed that the origins of Poland's crisis lay in Moscow's "big-power chauvinist" policy toward Eastern European countries.⁴

On 19 October, Pavel Yudin, Soviet ambassador to China, made an urgent appointment with Liu Shaoqi to deliver to the CCP Central Committee an important message from the CPSU Central Committee. Yudin told Liu that some PUWP leaders were planning to transform the party's politburo, which meant that there existed the danger that Poland might leave the socialist camp and join the Western bloc. Because of the serious situation in Poland, the Soviet leadership had decided to send a high-ranking delegation composed of Khrushchev, Vyacheslav Molotov, Anastas Mikoyan, and Lazar Kaganovich to visit Warsaw.⁵ In the meantime, through other channels, including foreign news reports and reports from the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, CCP leaders learned that Moscow was planning to use military means to solve the Polish problem.⁶

On the afternoon of 20 October, Mao called an urgent enlarged meeting of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee⁷ at his residence at Zhongnanhai (the location of the CCP central headquarters) to discuss the Polish crisis. According to the recollections of Wu Lengxi, director of the Xinhua News Agency

and one of Mao's secretaries, Mao did not even wait to get dressed and chaired the meeting in his pajamas. He first told the CCP leaders that he had called the meeting because the CPSU Central Committee had dispatched an urgent telegram to the CCP Central Committee, in which the Soviets emphasized that anti-Soviet elements in Poland had been rampant and had demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland. The Soviets believed that, in accordance with the Warsaw Pact, they had the right to station troops in Poland. Mao observed that although Moscow had not made the final decision to intervene militarily, it seemed that the Soviet leaders intended to do so. Wu Lengxi quoted foreign news reports to brief participants of the meeting that Polish troops and security forces had begun to mobilize, that workers in Warsaw had been armed, and that the Soviets had anchored their warships outside the Polish port Gdansk, and had even mobilized their troops on the western borders of the Soviet Union and in East Germany. At this moment, Mao commented: "When the son fails to obey, the rude father picks up a stick to beat him. When a socialist power uses military forces to intervene in the internal affairs of a neighboring socialist country, this is not only a violation of the basic principles of international relations; this is also a violation of the principles governing the relations between socialist countries. This is serious big-power chauvinism, which should not be allowed in any circumstances."⁸

Top CCP leaders quickly reached a consensus that the CCP must firmly oppose Moscow's military intervention in Poland, and must do everything possible to stop it. Mao proposed that a warning should be sent to the Soviets immediately, making it clear that if they were to use force in Poland, the CCP would be the first to protest it. Participants at the meeting unanimously approved the chairman's proposal.⁹

After the meeting, Mao summoned Yudin to his quarters. He asked the Soviet ambassador to inform Moscow that the CCP politburo had just met to discuss the Polish crisis, and that it was the CCP leadership's unanimous conclusion that the Soviet Union's intervention in Poland's internal affairs would be a serious violation of the principles of proletarian internationalism. Mao told Yudin that if the Soviets intervened militarily, the Chinese party and government would be vehement in its protest against it. Mao asked Yudin to convey this message "word for word" to Khrushchev. The Soviet ambassador, according to Wu Lengxi, who was present at the meeting, was sweating while listening to Mao and left Mao's quarters saying nothing but "yes, yes!" According to Chinese sources, he reported Mao's message to Moscow by telephone immediately after the meeting.¹⁰

Top CCP leaders' discussions at the 20 October meeting reveal two basic

tendencies that would consistently dominate Beijing's handling of the Polish crisis and, later, the Hungarian crisis. First, in exploring the origins of the crises, Beijing's leaders placed great emphasis upon the impact of Moscow's "big-power chauvinism," believing that things would not have gone so wrong if the Soviets had not treated their junior partners in Eastern Europe with a mistaken "father-son" mentality. Thus, in Beijing's view, Moscow's behavior bore considerable responsibility for causing the crises. Second, in contemplating strategies to deal with the crises, Beijing's leaders did not restrict their vision to the situation at hand. Indeed, they believed that in order to solve the crises, and to prevent similar crises from occurring in other parts of the Communist world, the international Communist movement had to be restructured to allow equality to prevail in relations between fraternal parties. But since the concept "equality" would be defined in Beijing's terms, the logical consequence of this restructuring was self-evident: Moscow would be removed from the center of the world proletarian revolution, and Beijing, by virtue of its moral superiority, would climb to that central position.

As the Polish crisis worsened, the CPSU Central Committee sent another urgent telegram to the CCP Committee on 21 October. The Soviet leaders informed the Chinese that a top Soviet delegation had met with PZWP leaders, but the situation in Warsaw deteriorated continuously. Moscow regarded this as a matter of utmost importance, since the unrest, among other things, could trigger great chaos in other Eastern European countries. Soviet leaders thus hoped that the CCP could send a high-ranking delegation, best headed by either Liu Shaoqi or Zhou Enlai, to Moscow to discuss how to deal with the crisis. The telegram also mentioned that leaders from other socialist countries in Eastern Europe would join the discussion.¹¹

After receiving the second telegram from Moscow, Mao summoned another enlarged Politburo Standing Committee meeting on the evening of 22 October.¹² The chairman told his colleagues that Beijing's opposition to Soviet intervention in Poland had caused repercussions in Moscow, and the Soviet leaders now invited two top CCP leaders to visit Moscow to "exchange opinions" with them. He asked the participants he had gathered to discuss and decide how Beijing should respond to Moscow's invitation. After analyzing the reports Beijing had received "through various sources" about the situation in Poland,¹³ CCP leaders attending the meeting all agreed that although the situation in Warsaw was complicated, it looked "unlikely that Poland [would] immediately leave the socialist camp or join the Western bloc." Therefore, they believed, it was still possible, even necessary, to recognize the current Polish leadership and to cooperate with it "on the basis of equality." Liu Shaoqi

and Zhou Enlai also mentioned that the Soviets had not already used force in Poland for two reasons: first, they had encountered firm resistance from the Polish leaders, and, second, Khrushchev should have learned of the CCP's opposition to Soviet intervention in Poland after he returned to Moscow from Warsaw, making him and other Soviet leaders feel that they had no other choice but to consult with the CCP. Both Liu and Zhou believed that Beijing should send a top delegation to Moscow, to which Mao and other CCP leaders agreed. Touching upon the delegation's tasks in Moscow, Mao emphasized that the Chinese should not be directly involved in discussions between the Soviets and the Poles but should talk to each party separately, playing the role as a mediator between them. The meeting lasted until the early morning hours of 23 October.¹⁴

Twenty minutes after the meeting ended, Mao, accompanied by Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, and Deng Xiaoping, met with Yudin at Zhongnanhai. The chairman now was ready to present to the Soviets Beijing's comprehensive evaluation of the Polish crisis and the Chinese plan to deal with it. He told the Soviet ambassador that Beijing had its own sources of information about what had been happening in Poland. Although it was true that reactionary elements were among the participants of the Polish incident, the overwhelming majority were ordinary workers and other common people. It seemed to him, said Mao, that the Polish comrades did not plan to leave the socialist camp but only wanted to reorganize the party's politburo. Then Mao commented that the Soviets had two options: they could either adopt a "soft" attitude or take a "hard" policy toward the Polish incident. Whereas taking a hard policy would mean dispatching troops to Poland to suppress the people there, the adoption of a soft attitude would involve providing advice to the Polish comrades. But if the Poles refused to follow the advice, the Soviets might need to make further concessions to them, such as acknowledging the new Polish leadership headed by Gomulka. In economic affairs, Mao continued, the Soviet Union should continue to provide assistance to Poland and cooperate with the Polish comrades on the basis of equality. By doing so, Mao claimed, Poland could be convinced to stay in the socialist camp.¹⁵

The chairman then turned to the Stalin issue. He stressed that although it was necessary to criticize Stalin's mistakes, the CCP disagreed with the Soviet leaders on how it should be done. The correct way, according to the chairman, was to criticize Stalin's mistakes only after his overall reputation had been properly protected. Following the tone he had established months before, Mao again stated that in evaluating Stalin's historical position, a "seventy to thirty ratio," or even an "eighty to twenty ratio," methodology should be used, ac-

knowledging that Stalin's merits far surpassed his offenses. "Stalin is a sword," concluded the chairman. "It can be used to fight the imperialists and various other enemies. . . . If this sword is put aside completely, if it is damaged, or if it is abandoned, the enemies will use this sword to try to kill us. Consequently, we would be lifting a rock only to drop it on our own feet."¹⁶

After the Soviet ambassador had left, at about 3:00 in the morning of 23 October, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping met to finalize the composition of the CCP delegation and the agenda it was to follow in its meeting with Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders in Moscow. They decided that the delegation would be headed by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, and it would include Wang Jiaxiang, a member of the Central Committee and Central Secretariat and former Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union, Hu Qiaomu, Mao Zedong's political secretary and a member of the CCP Central Committee in charge of the party's propaganda affairs, and Shi Zhe, the long-time (since 1941) Russian-language interpreter for CCP leaders.¹⁷ They also decided that Liu and Deng would not attend the meetings between Soviet and Polish leaders, but would meet the leaders of the two parties separately. The delegation's main task was defined as mediating the problems between the Soviet and Polish comrades by, on the one hand, criticizing the Soviet party's "big-power chauvinism" and, on the other hand, advising the Polish comrades to consider the overall interests of the socialist camp.¹⁸ A few hours later, the Chinese delegation left Beijing for Moscow by air.¹⁹

Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in Moscow

The CCP delegation arrived in Moscow late on the afternoon of 23 October (Moscow time).²⁰ According to Shi Zhe, Khrushchev personally welcomed the delegation at the Moscow airport. On their way to the guest house, Khrushchev talked to Liu Shaoqi nonstop, and his conversation, in Shi Zhe's words, "was full of complaints and had no order at all." While interpreting for Khrushchev, Shi Zhe felt that the Soviet leader was "extremely nervous." He also noticed that Liu Shaoqi sensed Khrushchev's extreme uneasiness but recalled that Liu did not make any substantial comments.²¹

When the Chinese arrived at the guest house, a meeting with Khrushchev began immediately.²² The Soviet leader again dominated the conversation and touched upon a number of issues. In addition to explaining to the Chinese that the new Soviet leadership had made great efforts to deal with various complications left over by Stalin (such as the ongoing ethnicity problem in the Soviet Union and the problem of how to treat the cadres who had been purged during Stalin's times), Khrushchev particularly emphasized that Moscow had

reformed its policies toward the socialist countries in Eastern Europe after Stalin's death, especially after the party's Twentieth Congress. Regarding the developments in Poland, Khrushchev provided a detailed description of the CPSU delegation's visit to Warsaw. He mentioned that initially the Soviets did have strong suspicion about the motives of the new PZWP leadership headed by Gomulka, fearing that the Polish meant to abandon the socialist camp. But, the Soviet leader confessed, after meeting Gomulka and his comrades in Warsaw, he found that despite all kinds of differences in opinion between Moscow and the new Polish leadership, his suspicion was groundless. Therefore, Khrushchev emphasized, Moscow was ready to acknowledge the new Polish leadership, and was willing to establish a cooperative relationship with it. Furthermore, since distrust and tension remained between Moscow and Warsaw, he hoped that the Chinese comrades, who had had a better image among the Poles, would provide "friendly advice" to Warsaw to persuade the Polish comrades to maintain solidarity with the Soviets. "This will be beneficial to the Soviet Union," Khrushchev stressed, "as well as beneficial to the whole socialist camp." Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, who felt that Khrushchev's statement was generally compatible with the principles set up by the CCP leadership in managing the Polish issue, promised to the Soviet leader that he had Beijing's full support.²³

While the meeting was under way, Khrushchev received a phone call from Erno Gero, the first secretary of the Hungarian Workers' Party. Gero told Khrushchev that since he had been preoccupied with domestic affairs, he was unable to come to Moscow to attend the meeting of leaders of socialist countries. Then Khrushchev received two phone calls from Marshal Georgy Zhukov, in which the Soviet defense minister reported that a mass riot, targeting mainly party and government offices, had broken out in Budapest, and that the Hungarian military had requested the Soviet Red Army stationed outside of Budapest to intervene. Both Khrushchev and Liu, according to Shi Zhe, were surprised by Zhukov's reports, since Gero mentioned nothing about the mass riot in his earlier phone call. Khrushchev commented that if the Hungarian government indeed wanted the Soviet Red Army to intervene, the decision must be made by the CPSU presidium.²⁴

As the end of the meeting approached, Liu Shaoqi followed the CCP delegation's prepared agenda to turn the conversation to the Stalin issue, stressing that Stalin, together with Lenin, was a "sword" highly valuable to international communism and thus should be appreciated and carefully protected. Khrushchev, however, carelessly responded that if Stalin had been a sword, it was now completely useless and, therefore, should be abandoned. Before the dis-

cussion could go any further, Khrushchev left in a hurry, saying that he needed to contact other presidium members to discuss the situation in Hungary.²⁵

The next day, 24 October, the CPSU presidium held a plenary session at the Kremlin, to which Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were invited.²⁶ After a brief discussion of the situation in Poland, the main part of the meeting focused on the emerging crisis in Hungary. Khrushchev, who chaired the meeting, said that the Soviet Red Army had already entered Budapest and that social order there had gradually returned to normal. Emphasizing that the Red Army's intervention had been welcomed by the workers in Budapest, he hoped the Chinese comrades would understand that the situation in Hungary was different from that in Poland: the latter reflected problems existing within the Communist Party, while the former demonstrated an anti-Communist and counterrevolutionary tendency. Several other presidium members, including Molotov, Bulganin, and Malenkov, rose to support Khrushchev's view.²⁷

Liu delivered a long speech at the meeting, which, together with the time spent on interpretation provided by Shi Zhe, lasted more than two hours. In accordance with Mao Zedong's opinions, Liu pointed out that the new PZWP leadership headed by Gomulka was still a Communist leadership, and that Poland should continue to be regarded as a socialist country. He emphasized that the divergence between Warsaw and Moscow was a matter of right and wrong, not a conflict between revolution and counterrevolution. Therefore, the problems with Poland should be solved through comrade-style criticism and self-criticism by both the Soviet and the Polish sides. Moscow would have been absolutely mistaken, Liu stressed, if it had decided to use military means to settle the crisis. He expressed Beijing's support of the Soviet leadership's decision to solve the Polish crisis through direct discussion with the new Polish leaders.²⁸

Liu then analyzed the origins of the tensions emerging between the Soviet Union and Poland, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries. He argued that the tensions originated in Moscow's "big-power chauvinism," particularly emphasizing that during Stalin's later years, the CPSU often imposed its will on other fraternal parties, forcing them to obey Moscow's command. If they failed to obey, Moscow would suppress them. On several occasions, the Soviet Union intervened in other countries without cause, which made them feel that their sovereignty was violated.²⁹ Liu believed that the emerging nationalist mood in Poland and Hungary was closely connected to the negative impact of Stalin's "big-power chauvinism," which had yet to be eliminated. Consequently, the relations between socialist countries were far from

normal, a situation that turned out to be one of the most important causes of the Polish and Hungarian crises. Liu, however, also made it clear that, in any circumstance, Beijing would continue to regard Moscow as the center of the international Communist movement. "Comrade Togliatti³⁰ introduced a 'multi-centrality' thesis," stated Liu, "but we told him that we must oppose that thesis. The center can only be the Soviet Union."³¹

Liu's carefully prepared speech expressed Beijing's concerns over some of the "big issues" facing the international Communist movement. Most important of all, Liu made it very clear that unless Moscow was to abandon completely its "big-power chauvinism" in dealing with other fraternal parties and states, crises similar to the ones taking place in Poland and Hungary would develop elsewhere. Although Liu stated that Moscow would remain the sole center of the socialist camp, the subtext was that Moscow's centrality was now being defined in Beijing's terms. Therefore, Liu's long speech must be read as a Chinese declaration of Beijing's virtual centrality in international communism.³²

On 26 October, the CPSU presidium held another meeting, and members of the Chinese delegation were again invited to attend. Liu and his comrades had hoped that this meeting would be devoted to correcting Moscow's "big-power chauvinism," and, consequently, they had spent the whole day of 25 October preparing for the discussion.³³ However, when the meeting began, it again focused on specific "small" problems related to Poland and Hungary; the "big-power chauvinism" issue did not come up. At one point, when Khrushchev mentioned that it seemed Gomulka was determined to remove Rokossovskii, Liu commented that it would be better for Gomulka to retain Rokossovskii and take no revenge on those who had purged him. Khrushchev, believing that Gomulka should hear this directly from the Chinese, proposed that Liu and the Chinese delegation visit Warsaw after completing their activities in Moscow. Liu, emphasizing that he needed to get Beijing's authorization as well as Warsaw's invitation, did not give an affirmative response to Khrushchev's proposal.³⁴

Substantial discussion on the "big issues," especially the ones concerning the general principles governing the international Communist movement, did not begin until the evening of 29 October, when Khrushchev, Molotov, and Bulganin met with Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping at the guest house. The Soviet leaders mentioned that both the Polish and Hungarian leaders had requested the Soviet Red Army to withdraw from their countries. Khrushchev emphasized that if the Red Army completely withdrew from these two coun-

tries, and if other Eastern European countries also requested that the Red Army leave, the Warsaw Pact would collapse, which would only benefit the imperialist countries.³⁵

In response, Liu Shaoqi conveyed to the Soviet leaders “a fundamental suggestion” from Mao Zedong: The Soviet Union should adopt a thoroughly new policy toward Eastern European countries. Moscow should let them handle their own political and economic affairs and not interfere with their internal matters. In addition, Moscow should respect not only Poland’s and Hungary’s but also Bulgaria’s and Romania’s desires for independence and should follow the principles of “pancha shila” in handling state-to-state relations with them.³⁶ In military affairs, Liu continued, Moscow should take the initiative to consult with Eastern European countries about how the Warsaw Pact should function, or about whether the Warsaw Pact should even exist. According to Liu, the Soviets had three options: they could maintain the Warsaw Pact completely, maintain the Warsaw Pact but withdraw Soviet troops from Eastern European countries and send them back when a war with the imperialist countries broke out, or maintain the Warsaw Pact but withdraw Soviet troops permanently. Liu explained to the Soviet leaders that Mao wanted these ideas introduced to the Soviet leaders, so that a better way would be found to consolidate the socialist camp, to strengthen the relations between the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, to enhance the Warsaw Pact, and to help the Soviet comrades achieve the support of the masses in Eastern European countries. It was, Liu emphasized, an indication of the Chinese goodwill toward, as well as solidarity with, the comrades in Moscow.³⁷

Khrushchev seemed willing to follow the Chinese advice. Although he explained that the Soviet Union had never interfered with other countries’ internal affairs, and that “big-power chauvinism” was a phenomenon that might have existed during Stalin’s period but had been eliminated completely after Stalin’s death, he expressed his “sincere thanks” to and general acceptance of Mao’s suggestions. He agreed that Eastern European countries should have the right to make their own political, economic, and military decisions.³⁸ When the meeting adjourned at 2:00 A.M. on 30 October, the two sides reached an agreement that a general statement concerning the basic principles governing relationships between socialist countries should be prepared and issued immediately.³⁹

Although several top Soviet leaders had reservations about whether or not the language of pancha shila should be used in directing relations between socialist countries, the CPSU presidium approved the document at a meeting on 30 October.⁴⁰ The same day, the Soviet government formally issued the

“Declaration on Developing and Enhancing the Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and other Socialist Countries,” in which Moscow promised to follow a pattern of more equal exchanges with other Communist states and parties. Two days later, the Chinese government issued a statement to support the Soviet declaration, praising it as a document with “great significance” that will “enhance the solidarity between socialist countries.”⁴¹

The Decision to Suppress the “Reactionary Riots” in Hungary

When the Chinese delegation was in Moscow, the situation in Hungary changed dramatically. The uprisings in Budapest, which began on 23 October, gradually paralyzed the Communist regime there, pushing it to the verge of collapse. This development alarmed both the Chinese delegation in Moscow and Mao and the other CCP leaders in Beijing.

As discussed earlier, when the Hungarian crisis erupted, Beijing’s leaders regarded it as another problem caused by Moscow’s failure to treat the Hungarians as equals. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, in meetings with top Soviet leaders in Moscow, argued that it was time for Moscow to adopt a more equal approach toward the comrades in Budapest, which, they believed, would contribute to the settlement of the Hungarian crisis. They originally had strong reservations about Moscow sending tanks into Budapest to suppress the uprising there.⁴²

But the situation in Hungary deteriorated rapidly, quickly exceeding the expectations of the Chinese leaders. Around 29 and 30 October, Mao Zedong in Beijing received a series of reports, the most important of which were from Hu Jibang, *Renmin ribao*’s chief correspondent in Budapest, which stated that “reactionary forces, with the support of international imperialists, were doing everything possible to overthrow the Hungarian [Communist] government.”⁴³ These reports led Mao and his fellow CCP leaders to reconsider the nature of the Hungarian crisis. They now speculated that behind the Hungarian crisis lay a well-coordinated plot directed by the international imperialists and that, if the turmoil was not stopped, a “reactionary restoration” would occur in Hungary. Consequently, they began to believe that indeed “the Hungarian crisis was different from the Polish crisis in nature—while the latter is anti-Soviet, the former is anti-Communist.”⁴⁴

The view that the events in Hungary were “counterrevolutionary” in nature was further reinforced by reports from the Chinese delegation in Moscow. With the situation in Hungary worsening on a daily basis, the Soviet leaders had been under great pressure to determine whether or not to keep the Red Army there, especially after the new Hungarian prime minister, Imre Nagy,

formally requested that the Red Army leave. Between 27 and 31 October their attitude fluctuated.⁴⁵ At the meeting with the Chinese delegation on the evening of 29 October, Khrushchev told Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping that Moscow planned to withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary. Liu and Deng immediately reported this new development to Beijing.⁴⁶ The next morning, the Chinese delegation received a copy of a report on the situation in Hungary by Anastas Mikoyan, who, together with Mikhail Suslov, had been in Hungary since the crisis broke out. The report pointed out that after Nagy assumed the position as prime minister, the situation in Budapest deteriorated continuously. When Soviet troops, following the request of Nagy's government, withdrew from Budapest on 29 October, the Hungarian party was quickly paralyzed. Indeed, the reactionary forces were taking control of Budapest and other parts of Hungary, and many party members and members of the security forces were being persecuted, or even brutally murdered. Mikoyan proposed in the report that Moscow carefully reconsider its policy toward the Hungarian crisis.⁴⁷

Members of the Chinese delegation spent the whole day of 30 October discussing Mikoyan's report. They carefully weighed the pros and cons of two basic options. The first option was to advise Moscow to continue withdrawing the Red Army from Hungary. But if the Red Army were to withdraw, the Chinese predicted that Hungary would be taken over by pro-imperialist reactionary forces. The second option was to encourage Moscow not only to retain the Red Army in Hungary but also to use it by joining forces with the remaining revolutionary elements there and suppressing the reactionary riots. While the second option seemed to be the right one to choose, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping also saw its obvious contradiction with what the Chinese delegation had just pushed Moscow to do: refrain from using military forces to intervene in the internal affairs of a fraternal country. Liu Shaoqi decided to ask for Beijing's instruction.⁴⁸

In Beijing, the CCP leadership held a series of politburo enlarged meetings from 29 to 31 October to discuss the worsening situation in Hungary.⁴⁹ Basing their judgment on the reports from Budapest and Moscow, top CCP leaders finally reached the conclusion that the Hungarian crisis had changed from being anti-Soviet in nature to anti-Communist as the result of the escalating riots in Budapest, that there existed the danger of a "reactionary restoration" in Hungary, and that behind the deteriorating crisis was a huge "international imperialist plot." The CCP leadership thus decided to send an urgent telegram to the Chinese delegation in Moscow, instructing Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping to meet the Soviet leaders immediately and, in the name of the CCP Cen-

tral Committee, express firm opposition to Soviet troops' withdrawal from Hungary.⁵⁰ But Mao also emphasized that although the Soviet Red Army certainly should intervene, it was better to wait to take decisive action until after the reactionary elements had further exposed themselves.⁵¹

Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, following Beijing's instruction, brought the Chinese opinions to the CPSU presidium's plenary session on the evening of 30 October. At the meeting, Liu Shaoqi made it clear that Beijing believed it a mistake for the Soviets to withdraw their troops from Hungary. He pointed out that this would be a betrayal of the Hungarian people and that the Soviet leaders would be looked back upon as "historical criminals."⁵² Deng Xiaoping made three proposals: First, the Soviet army should remain in Hungary and should not "abandon the revolutionary ground and allow the enemy to occupy it." Second, "everything should be done to support the loyal members of the Hungarian party, help them to control the political power, so that they will unite party members, revolutionary elements, and activists around them, forming a stronghold to support the party." Third, the Soviet and Hungarian parties should "control the military and the police, using them to hold the ground, protect the government, and maintain order, making sure that the party organs and the government will not be sabotaged." Deng stressed that it was important for the Soviet troops to "play a model role, demonstrating true internationalism."⁵³ However, according to Liu's later report, the Soviet leaders did not accept Deng's suggestion because they believed that they had to withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary.⁵⁴

The situation took a complete turn the next day as the Chinese delegation was preparing to leave Moscow. Late that afternoon, the delegation received a phone call from the Kremlin that asked the Chinese to arrive at the airport one hour earlier than originally scheduled.⁵⁵ When the Chinese arrived at the airport, they found that all the members of the Soviet presidium were there to say farewell to them. Khrushchev immediately informed Liu that the Soviet presidium, after meeting for the whole day, had reached the decision to use military force to suppress the "reactionary revolt" in Budapest and to "help the Hungarian party and people to defend socialism in Hungary."⁵⁶ Before the Chinese boarded the airplane, according to Liu's later report, the Soviet leaders expressed their "sincere thanks" for the assistance from the Chinese party, first on the Polish issue, and then on the Hungarian issue.⁵⁷ Three days later, on 4 November, the Soviet Red Army's offensive against the "reactionary forces" in Budapest began. These latest developments made CCP leaders in Beijing firmly believe that they had played a central role in Moscow's decision to "suppress the reactionary elements in Hungary."⁵⁸

Lessons Beijing Learned from the Polish and Hungarian Crises

Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping returned to Beijing late on the evening of 1 November. They immediately gave a brief report to Mao and several other top CCP leaders (Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, and Peng Zhen) about the meetings they held with Soviet leaders in Moscow.⁵⁹ The Chinese delegation's experience in Moscow, which indicated the CCP's increasing influence within the international Communist movement, excited Mao and other CCP leaders. Indeed, according to Wu Lengxi, CCP leaders were "elated and in buoyant spirits."⁶⁰ Liu, in analyzing the causes of the Polish and Hungarian crises, again emphasized that it was the Soviet leaders' deep-rooted "big-power chauvinism" that had resulted in serious discontent from other parties, especially those in Eastern Europe, where nationalism had deep historical roots.⁶¹ Deng Xiaoping used vivid language to describe how the Polish comrades complained emotionally to the Chinese about their suffering at the hands of the Soviets, just like "[China's] poor peasants and farm laborers denounced the landlords during the land reforms." Deng also pointed out that although the Soviet leaders had begun to realize that big-power politics was no longer working in dealing with other socialist countries, they had yet "to change their old course of action and make a new start." Deng believed it necessary for the Chinese party to play an important role in mediating relations between the Soviet and Eastern European parties.⁶²

From 2 November to mid-December, the CCP leadership held a series of meetings, including the Central Committee's Second Plenary Session (held from 10 to 15 November), to discuss important domestic and international issues. How to summarize and learn from the lessons of "Hungary's reactionary riots" became a central theme of these meetings.⁶³

The CCP leaders again confirmed the understanding that what happened in Hungary late in October was a "reactionary incident," which bore serious danger of "capitalist restoration" in a socialist country. They believed that the incident certainly had a profound international background, "representing the most serious attack of the international imperialist forces against the socialist camp since the Korean War."⁶⁴ On one occasion, Zhou Enlai mentioned that the Western countries had been using the Hungarian crisis to stir up anti-Soviet and anti-Communist sentiment, causing Communist Party members in many countries to vacillate in their loyalty to, or even to betray, the party. He emphasized that the CCP should be a vanguard in repulsing this tide of international reactionaryism.⁶⁵

Mao Zedong pointed to "the existence of class struggle as an unavoidable reality" in socialist countries, regarding it as a deep-rooted cause underlying

the crisis. In the chairman's view, "The fundamental problem with some Eastern European countries is that they have not done a good job of waging class struggle and have left so many reactionaries at large; nor have they trained their proletarians in class struggle to help them learn how to draw a clear distinction between the people and the enemy, between right and wrong, and between materialism and idealism. And now they have to reap what they have sown; they have brought the fire upon their own heads."⁶⁶

Both Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi argued that the discontent that had long existed among Hungary's people, and workers and students in particular, was the foundation for the Hungarian crisis and that domestic and international reactionary forces took advantage of it. In the chairman's view, if the Hungarian party leadership had been more resolute and experienced, the mass riots might not have occurred in the first place. But because the Hungarian party and its leadership were weak, reactionary forces at home and abroad were able to manipulate the situation in Hungary, sending the mass riots out of control.⁶⁷ These perceptions would play an important role in the continuous radicalization of Chinese politics and social life in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The CCP leaders also believed that a vulnerable, confusing, and inconsistent attitude on the part of the Soviet leaders (and Khrushchev in particular) contributed to the Hungarian crisis' escalation. Their general criticism of the Soviet leadership focused on three areas. First, Moscow's "big-power chauvinism," especially during the Stalin era, created tension between the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. Second, Khrushchev's de-Stalinization caused widespread confusion among Communist Party members throughout Eastern Europe. Third, the Soviet leaders were not sophisticated enough to have a correct understanding of the crises when they erupted in Poland and Hungary. As a result, while they planned, mistakenly, to intervene in Poland, they considered, equally mistakenly, withdrawing from Hungary. Consequently, the situation in Hungary went out of control.⁶⁸

On the basis of these discussions, the CCP leadership decided to publish on 29 December 1956 a lengthy article, titled "Another Discussion of the Historical Lessons of the Proletarian Dictatorship," in *Renmin ribao*, expressing the party leadership's general views on the Hungarian crisis and its relation to Khrushchev's de-Stalinization.⁶⁹ When the article was being drafted, Mao had specific instructions regarding its contents: First, the article should define the Hungarian crisis as a reactionary incident but should not touch upon small details. Second, the article should confirm that, in general, the CPSU's Twentieth Congress had its positive side (including its criticism of Stalin's mistakes) but should make it clear that it was incorrect to negate Stalin completely. Third,



Zhou Enlai (second from left) talking to Hungarian Communist leader János Kádár (far right), January 1957. Xinhua News Agency.

the article should point out the importance of making distinctions between two kinds of contradictions existing within socialist countries—those between the enemy and the people, and those among the people. Fourth, the article should regard the direction of the Soviet Union's socialist revolution and reconstruction as positive and correct in general but should also point out that the Soviet leaders had committed many mistakes. Fifth, the article should use explicit language to confirm that Stalin, regardless of all the mistakes he had committed, remained a great Marxist-Leninist revolutionary leader. "Khrushchev abandoned Stalin," Mao emphasized, "and the others [the imperialists and the revisionists] used it [the abandonment] to attack him, causing him to be besieged from all directions." Thus, Mao concluded, Stalin's banner should never be forsaken.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The Polish and Hungarian crises had a profound impact on the orientation of China's domestic and international policies, as well as on the future development of the international Communist movement. As far as China's do-

mestic situation was concerned, Beijing's attitude toward the Hungarian crisis reflected Mao's persistent belief that "class struggle continued to exist in a socialist country." The crisis, in turn, further strengthened Mao's determination to promote China's continuous revolution, especially in the fields of politics and ideology.⁷¹ In early 1957, in the wake of the Polish and Hungarian crises, Mao initiated the Hundred Flowers Campaign to encourage China's intellectuals to help the CCP to "correct its mistakes." But when some intellectuals did voice their criticism of the party, an Anti-Rightist movement began to sweep across China, branding over 300,000 intellectuals (the overwhelming majority of whom never said anything against the party) as "rightists," a label that would effectively silence them and ruin their careers.⁷² When opposition to and/or suspicion of Mao's "revolutionary offensives" emerged, either within or without the CCP, Mao and his close followers would invoke the "lessons of the Hungarian reactionary incident" to justify Mao's policies, claiming that if the Chinese did not heed these lessons, China would face the "danger of a Hungarian incident." Mao made it clear that one purpose of the CCP's Hundred Flowers Campaign was to "induce" the bad elements to come out into the open so that they would be "divided and isolated" in many "small Hungaries," and could then be eliminated.⁷³ In retrospect, the outcome of the Polish and Hungarian crises complicated Chinese politics and social life while pushing Mao's continuous revolution to ever more radical stages.

The crises in Poland and Hungary also enhanced Mao's and the CCP leadership's consciousness of China's centrality in the world proletarian revolution. The Beijing leadership's perception of China's great contributions to the settlement of the Polish and Hungarian crises strengthened the belief that the CCP should occupy a more prominent position in the international Communist movement, as well as justified its critical attitude toward the seemingly less sophisticated Soviet leadership. In Liu Shaoqi's summary of Beijing's management of the Polish and Hungarian crises, which he delivered to the party Central Committee's Second Plenary Session on 10 November 1956, he spent much time exposing Moscow's inability to handle complicated international issues.⁷⁴ After Zhou Enlai returned from a trip to the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary in January 1957, he presented a comprehensive report summarizing the visit. In it he made extensive comments on the Soviet leadership's lack of sophistication in managing the complex and potentially explosive situations both within the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. He particularly emphasized that the CCP leadership's understanding of important international issues had been more farsighted than that of the Soviet leaders.⁷⁵ In several internal speeches, Mao Zedong discussed the CCP's disagreements with

the Soviet leaders, emphasizing that Khrushchev and his comrades had abandoned not only “the banner of Stalin” but also, to a large extent, “the banner of Lenin.” Thus it became the duty of the CCP to play a central role in “holding high the banner” of true Marxism-Leninism.⁷⁶

All of these developments, as an indication of a deep rift between Beijing and Moscow, produced a profound and long-lasting effect on the development of the international Communist movement and, at the same time, the orientation of the Cold War. For decades, especially after the end of the Second World War, Communists all over the world had shared a strong sense that “history is on our side.” This belief allowed the international Communist movement constantly to gain strength and momentum while creating a consciousness of unity among Communist parties and states. The Polish and Hungarian crises of 1956, and the ways in which Beijing and Moscow dealt with them, exposed the profound contradictions between communism as a set of utopian ideals and as a practical human experience. For the first time in twentieth-century history, Communists throughout the world began to lose confidence in the ideals in which they once had believed. As a result, Communist states increasingly felt the need to use state power to control the minds and behavior of both party members and ordinary citizens. The Cold War was from the beginning a battle over which system—communism or liberal capitalism—was superior and which would prevail. International communism was now losing this battle.



CHAPTER 7 BEIJING AND THE TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS OF 1958

We must not fear the ghost. The more we fear the ghost, the more it will present a deadly threat to us, and then it will invade our house and swallow us. Since we do not fear the ghost, we decide to shell Jinmen.

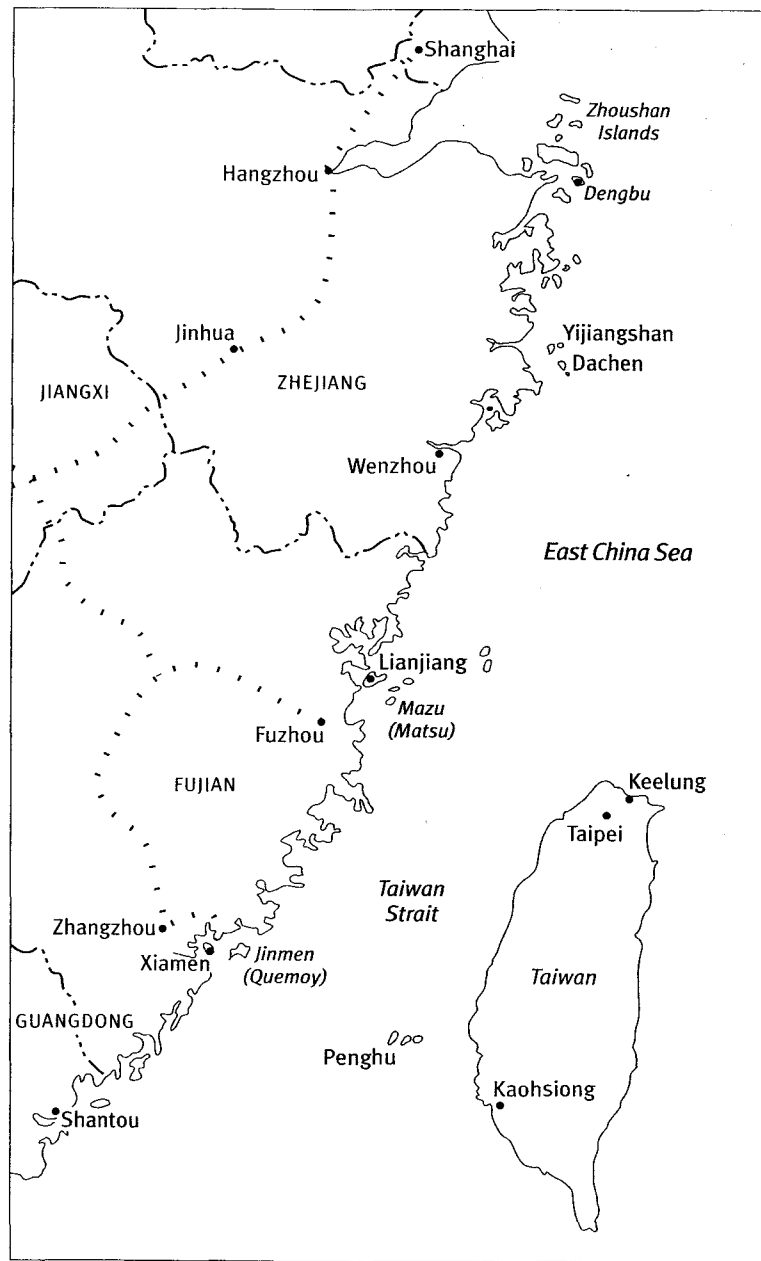
—Mao Zedong (1958)

Besides its disadvantageous side, a tense [international] situation can mobilize the population, can particularly mobilize the backward people, can mobilize the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction.

—Mao Zedong (1958)

At 5:30 P.M. on 23 August 1958, the People’s Liberation Army units in Fujian province suddenly began an intensive artillery barrage of the GMD-controlled Jinmen islands.¹ In the first minute, some 2,600 rounds were fired. When the shelling ended around 6:55 P.M., the PLA shore batteries had poured more than 30,000 shells on Jinmen. About 600 GMD officers and soldiers were reportedly killed, among whom were three deputy commanders of the GMD’s Jinmen garrison.²

In the ensuing six weeks, the PLA’s artillery bombardment continued, and several hundred thousand artillery shells exploded on the Jinmen islands and in the waters around them. By early September, a massive PLA invasion of Jinmen and other GMD-controlled offshore islands seemed imminent. In response to the rapidly escalating crisis in the Taiwan Strait, the Eisenhower administration reinforced the strength of the Seventh Fleet in East Asia and ordered U.S. naval vessels to help the GMD protect Jinmen’s supply lines.³ The leaders of the Soviet Union were also alarmed. Fearing that Beijing’s provocation might get out of control and cause a general confrontation involving the use of nuclear weapons between the Communist and capitalist blocs, they sent Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to Beijing early in September to inquire about Chinese



EASTERN CHINA AND THE TAIWAN STRAIT

leaders' intentions.⁴ Early in October, however, the situation changed abruptly. On 6 October, Beijing issued a "Message to the Compatriots in Taiwan" in the name of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai, calling for a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue so that all Chinese might unite in opposition to the "American plot" to divide China permanently.⁵ From that day on, the PLA dramatically relaxed its siege of Jinmen. Consequently, the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis ended without provoking a major confrontation between the Communist and capitalist camps.

Why and how did Beijing's leaders decide to shell Jinmen in August 1958? How did Beijing's leaders—and Mao Zedong in particular—manage the crisis? What factors caused Beijing's leaders to end the crisis as abruptly as they initiated it?⁶ With the support of insights gained from Chinese sources recently made available, this chapter will first review the evolution of Beijing's Taiwan policy from 1949 to 1958; it will then discuss the domestic and international situations facing Beijing prior to the crisis, emphasizing the impact of the revolutionary atmosphere prevailing in China in 1958; it will examine how Beijing's leaders handled the crisis, and how and why Beijing's perceptions and policies changed during the course of the crisis; and it will conclude with some general discussion about what we may learn from the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958.

Beijing's Taiwan Policy, 1949–1958

Since 1949, when the Nationalist regime was defeated by the CCP in the civil war and fled to Taiwan, the CCP and the GMD had been engaged in a continuous confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, making this area one of the main "hot spots" of the Cold War. The development of Beijing's Taiwan policy from 1949 to 1958 can be divided into four distinctive phases.

The First Phase: Preparing to "Liberate Taiwan," Fall 1949–Summer 1950

During this period, when the PLA was cleansing the GMD remnants on the Chinese mainland, the CCP leadership actively prepared for conducting a major amphibious campaign to "liberate Taiwan," so that mainland China and Taiwan could be unified under a new Chinese Communist regime.

The CCP leadership began planning for an attack on Taiwan in mid-June 1949. On 14 June, Mao Zedong sent a telegram to PLA commanders in East China, urging them to "pay attention to seizing Taiwan immediately."⁷ A week later, Mao dispatched another telegram to top PLA commanders in coastal provinces, again stressing the utmost importance of quickly settling the Taiwan issue and ordering them to "complete all preparations during summer and

autumn [of 1949] and occupy Taiwan in the coming winter.”⁸ Contemplating the means needed for seizing Taiwan, Mao paid special attention to getting assistance from Communist operatives in the GMD and air and naval support from the Soviet Union.⁹ During Liu Shaoqi’s secret visit to Moscow from late June to early August, the CCP’s second in command endeavored to persuade Stalin to commit the strength of the Soviet Union behind the PLA’s Taiwan campaign. The Soviet leader, however, agreed only to help the CCP establish its own air force and navy.¹⁰ Consequently, the CCP leadership had to extend the deadline for completing the Taiwan campaign preparations to summer 1950.¹¹

In October and November 1949, the CCP’s Taiwan campaign preparations suffered a big setback when the PLA experienced two significant defeats in attempting to occupy Jinmen and Dengbu (a small island off Zhejiang province).¹² These defeats shocked both PLA commanders in East China and CCP leaders in Beijing, forcing them to reconsider the feasibility of conducting operations against Taiwan in the summer of 1950. After a series of deliberations and readjustments, by early summer 1950, CCP military planners again postponed an attack on Taiwan to summer 1951.¹³

*The Second Phase: Korea, Not Taiwan,
Becomes the Focus, June 1950–July 1953*

The outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, as well as President Harry Truman’s subsequent announcement that the Seventh Fleet would enter the Taiwan Strait to neutralize this area, completely changed the strategic scenario in East Asia. Around the same time, the GMD’s secret services successfully unearthed a deep-rooted CCP underground spy network in Taiwan, shattering Beijing’s hope for collaboration with elements within the GMD during a Taiwan campaign.¹⁴ These two events combined to force Beijing’s leaders to postpone further the plan to attack Taiwan, and Beijing’s Taiwan policy entered the second phase.

On 30 June, five days after the eruption of the war in Korea, Zhou Enlai ordered Xiao Jinguang, the Chinese navy commander, to postpone preparations for invading Taiwan.¹⁵ In mid-July, PLA commanders in East China received additional orders from Beijing to postpone the Taiwan campaign, so that China’s military emphasis would be placed on “resisting America and assisting Korea.”¹⁶ On 11 August, the CMC followed General Chen Yi’s suggestion to delay the Taiwan campaign until 1952 and postpone the attack on Jinmen until after April 1951.¹⁷ After Chinese troops entered the Korean War in October 1950, the CCP leadership formally called off the plan to invade Taiwan.¹⁸

During the three years of China’s intervention in Korea, Beijing maintained a defensive posture in relation to the GMD across the Taiwan Strait. While the PLA made no effort to attack the GMD-controlled offshore islands, the Nationalists occasionally invaded the Communist-controlled coastal areas.¹⁹ In the meantime, the GMD leader Jiang Jieshi conducted a series of reforms in Taiwan, including a comprehensive land reform program, thus effectively enhancing the GMD regime’s foundation there.²⁰ Consequently, the CCP-GMD confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, as the extension of the Chinese civil war, was prolonged.

The Third Phase: The First Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1954–1955

With the end of the Korean War in July 1953, CCP leaders found it necessary and possible to turn their attention back to the Taiwan issue. Because of specific domestic and international considerations, Mao decided to “highlight” the Taiwan issue, which led to the eruption of the first Taiwan Strait crisis.

In December 1953, Chen Yi, then commander and political commissar of the PLA’s East China Military Region, proposed to Mao to concentrate five armies in Fujian to prepare for attacking Jinmen. He also suggested constructing several new airfields in East China and two major railway lines into Fujian.²¹ Mao initially approved all of Chen Yi’s proposals but then quickly changed his mind. The chairman believed that before attacking the GMD-controlled islands off the Fujian coast, the PLA should first invade and liberate several islands still occupied by GMD troops, especially Dachen and Yijiangshan, off the coast of Zhejiang province.²² In December 1953, the PLA’s East China Military Region formally established a joint headquarters for naval, air, and land operations in the Zhejiang area.²³ In January 1954, the CMC approved the operational plan involving the use of the PLA’s three services in the Zhejiang campaign.²⁴ Throughout the first half of 1954, Beijing prepared for the campaign.

Mao, as well as Beijing’s top military planners, decided to liberate the islands off Zhejiang province before attacking Jinmen for two tactical reasons. First, the Zhejiang area was close to Shanghai, China’s main industrial center, and the mouth of the Yangzi River. Since 1949, the GMD had continuously used the islands off Zhejiang as bases to harass the mainland’s coastal region, threatening the security of Shanghai and neighboring areas, as well as blocking the maritime transportation route south of the Yangzi River. Seizing these islands would greatly enhance the PRC’s coastal security in the Shanghai-Zhejiang region.²⁵ Second, Fujian was one of China’s most backward regions and had no railway or modern airport at that time, making it difficult for the PLA to orga-

nize large-scale amphibious landing operations there. In comparison, the GMD had greatly strengthened Jinmen's defensive system since 1949-50, transforming the island into an enhanced fortress. Beijing's leaders thus believed that until the PLA could improve logistic capacity and receive proper air support in Fujian, the plan to invade Jinmen should be put on hold.²⁶

When the PLA's East China Military Region was actively preparing for the Zhejiang campaign, Mao suddenly changed the emphasis of Beijing's Taiwan strategy again. In a telegram to Zhou Enlai on 23 July 1954, Mao sternly criticized the premier, who had just attended the Geneva conference and was then visiting several socialist countries in Eastern Europe. The chairman claimed: "After the end of the Korean War, we failed to highlight the task [the liberation of Taiwan] to the people in the whole country in a timely manner (we are about six months behind). We failed to take necessary measures and make effective efforts in military affairs, on the diplomatic front, and also in our propaganda to serve this task. If we do not highlight this task now, and if we do not work for it [in the future], we are committing a serious political mistake."²⁷

Following Mao's instruction to "highlight the Taiwan issue," the Chinese media immediately initiated a propaganda campaign with "We must liberate Taiwan" as the central slogan.²⁸ In the meantime, the PLA high command revised the original campaign plan: in addition to conducting landing operations against the islands off Zhejiang province, the PLA's shore batteries in Fujian were to prepare to shell Jinmen.²⁹

This latest decision made some sense from a military perspective. As a military strategist, Mao certainly understood that by shelling Jinmen before conducting landing operations from Zhejiang, the PLA would distract the attention of the GMD high command, thus better guaranteeing the success of the Zhejiang campaign. Indeed, this is exactly how Beijing's official history interpreted the change of plans.³⁰

But the military interpretation alone does not satisfactorily reveal the main reasons underlying the decision to shell Jinmen.³¹ Mao and the CCP leadership also intended to use the shelling to "highlight" the Taiwan question, stressing that it was an internal Chinese issue. A CCP Central Committee telegram to Zhou Enlai dated 27 July 1954 pointed out: "After the armistices in Korea and Indochina, the Americans will not be willing to accept their failure at the Geneva conference, and will inevitably carry out policies designed to create international tension, to seize more spheres of influence from the British and the French, to expand military bases and prepare for fighting a war, and to remain hostile toward our country." In particular, the telegram stressed, Washington had been "discussing signing a treaty of mutual defense with Jiang Jie-

shi," which made it necessary for Beijing to continue "the war against Jiang's bandit clique in Taiwan" by introducing "the slogan of liberating Taiwan."³² Therefore, Mao and the Beijing leadership decided to order the PLA to shell Jinmen to expose Washington's plot of "interfering with China's internal affairs."³³

The decision to shell Jinmen must also be understood in the context of Mao's aspiration for creating new momentum for his continuous revolution. The end of the Korean War allowed Mao and his comrades to devote China's resources to the "socialist revolution and reconstruction" at home. From the chairman's perspective, 1954-55 represented a crucial transitional period for the CCP to build the foundation for a socialist society in China. In search of means to mobilize the party and the ordinary Chinese citizens for this new stage of the Chinese revolution, Mao, informed by his Korean War experience, again sensed the need to emphasize the existence of outside threats (be it from Jiang's GMD or from the United States). In justifying Beijing's new Taiwan strategy, Mao and the CCP leadership stressed in an internal correspondence: "The introduction of the task [the liberation of Taiwan] is not just for the purpose of undermining the American-Jiang plot to sign a military treaty; rather, and more important, by highlighting the task we mean to raise the political consciousness and political alertness of the people of the whole country; we mean to stir up our people's revolutionary enthusiasm, thus promoting our nation's socialist reconstruction."³⁴

This emphasis upon using the Taiwan issue to promote domestic mobilization, however, contradicted from the beginning the "peaceful coexistence" foreign policy line Zhou Enlai was endeavoring to promote around the same period.³⁵ It also caused great confusion in terms of Beijing's goals for the new strategy (that is, deterring American interference in China's internal affairs and driving a wedge between Taipei and Washington). When the PLA's shore batteries fiercely bombarded Jinmen on 3 and 22 September,³⁶ and especially after the PLA increased pressure on the GMD-controlled Dachen and Yijiangshan islands off Zhejiang, Washington and Taipei accelerated negotiations toward signing a defense treaty.³⁷ On 2 December 1954, the treaty was formally signed, with Washington officially committing to using military force to defend Taiwan in the case of a Communist invasion.³⁸ The treaty, though, did not include explicit U.S. commitment to defending the GMD-controlled offshore islands. When the PLA finally conducted a full-scale landing operation in Dachen and Yijiangshan in January 1955, Washington, except for helping GMD troops to withdraw from these islands, did not intervene.³⁹ When the PLA occupied all GMD-controlled islands off Zhejiang province in February 1955

and, two months later, Zhou Enlai announced in Bandung, Indonesia, that Beijing was willing to negotiate with Washington to “reduce the tension in the Far East,” the first Taiwan Strait crisis ended.⁴⁰

The Fourth Phase: The Peace Initiative, Mid-1955–1957

The consequences of the 1954–55 Taiwan Strait crisis presented to Beijing’s leaders a paradoxical challenge. On the one hand, the crisis caused the international community to pay attention to the Taiwan issue (although not exactly in the way Beijing’s leaders had wanted), and the PLA’s liberation of offshore islands in Zhejiang significantly improved the PRC’s coastal security north of Fujian province. Therefore, Mao and his comrades felt justified in telling the Chinese people that Beijing’s handling of the crisis was a great success.⁴¹ On the other hand, the American-Taiwan defense treaty made it more difficult for the PLA to “liberate Taiwan” and, as a result, the separation between the mainland and Taiwan became further formalized. In order to deal with this challenge, the CCP leadership began to reexamine its Taiwan policy in 1955, which resulted in a shift toward a possible peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue through negotiations with the GMD.

Zhou Enlai was one of the main architects of the new peace initiative, and at this moment Mao supported him.⁴² In July 1955, Zhou stated at the Second Session of the People’s Congress that “there are two ways for the Chinese people to liberate Taiwan, one military way and one peaceful way. If possible, the Chinese people are willing to liberate Taiwan through the peaceful way.”⁴³ On 30 January 1956, Zhou announced the CCP’s new policy toward Jiang Jieshi and the GMD at a plenary session of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference. While reiterating that the CCP was prepared to use military means to liberate Taiwan whenever necessary, the Chinese premier also made it clear that Beijing was now willing to consider “solving the Taiwan issue” in peaceful ways. He also welcomed GMD members living in Taiwan to come back to visit the mainland, claiming that “anyone who is willing to contribute to the unification of the motherland” would be pardoned for “whatever wrongdoing” they might have committed in the past.⁴⁴ After a series of probes, Zhou Enlai announced publicly on 28 June 1956 that Beijing was “willing to discuss with the Taiwan authorities about the concrete steps toward, as well as conditions for, a peaceful liberation of Taiwan.” He invited the Taiwan authorities to “dispatch representatives to Beijing, or to another proper location, to begin such discussion with us.”⁴⁵ This statement represented a radical departure from Beijing’s militant policy during the first Taiwan Strait crisis less than two years earlier.

Beijing continued to carry out its new moderate policy toward Taiwan

throughout late 1956 and 1957. In addition to openly announcing the CCP’s willingness to negotiate with the GMD, Beijing’s leaders also explored contacting Jiang and other GMD leaders in Taipei through secret channels. One such channel was through a Hong Kong-based freelance journalist named Cao Junren, who had extensive connections with GMD leaders. In a meeting with Cao on 7 October 1956, Zhou outlined Beijing’s conditions for a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue: After Taiwan’s “return to the motherland,” the island would continue to be governed by the GMD, and a “proper position” would be arranged for Jiang Jieshi in the central government. Zhou also emphasized that Beijing had stopped anti-Jiang propaganda in order to create an atmosphere for negotiating with the GMD.⁴⁶ From 1956 to 1958, Cao frequently traveled to Beijing to serve as a messenger between top CCP and GMD leaders. On one occasion, Zhou claimed that in carrying out the moderate policy toward Taiwan, “we are sincere and patient, we can wait.”⁴⁷

Beijing’s peace initiative toward Taiwan in 1955–57 was a natural outgrowth of the CCP’s longtime tradition of pursuing a “united front” with the GMD whenever the party leadership deemed it necessary.⁴⁸ When the GMD regime in Taiwan signed the treaty of mutual defense with the United States, Mao and his comrades not only realized that liberating Taiwan by military means had become next to impossible but also were aware of the urgent need to do everything possible to prevent Taiwan from being “colonized” by a hostile imperialist foreign power.⁴⁹ In addition, two important international and domestic pursuits supported China’s Taiwan policy. First, during this same period, Beijing was seeking to improve the PRC’s international status through the introduction of the principles of *pancha shila* and the “Bandung spirit,” and the peace initiative toward Taiwan became an important component of this endeavor.⁵⁰ Second, in September 1956, CCP’s Eighth National Congress adopted a policy that emphasized economic reconstruction rather than class struggle in following China’s path toward a socialist society, and the Taiwan initiative was compatible with this policy.⁵¹ Not surprising at all, with dramatic changes in these two pursuits in 1958, Beijing would return to a highly militant policy toward Taiwan, resulting in the second Taiwan Strait crisis.

1958: The Year of Mao’s Revolutionary Outburst

Beijing’s return to a more militant strategy toward Taiwan began around late 1957 and early 1958. On 18 December 1957, Mao Zedong instructed Peng Dehuai, China’s defense minister, to “consider the question of moving our air force into Fujian in 1958.”⁵² In mid-January, the headquarters of Fujian Military Region formulated plans for PLA air units to enter Fujian by early summer

1958.⁵³ On 31 January 1958, Peng reported at a CMC meeting that a main railway line leading to Xiamen had been completed (which was key to the PLA's large-scale military operations aimed at Jinmen), that numerous PLA artillery units had been deployed in Fujian, and that the PLA air force would finish all preparations for occupying the newly constructed airfields in Fujian in July or August. Early in March, Mao approved Peng's plans.⁵⁴ In April, the headquarters of the Fujian Military Region followed the CMC's instruction to work out a detailed contingency plan to shell Jinmen and formally submitted it to Beijing for approval on 27 April.⁵⁵ Behind these changes was Mao himself. When top CCP leaders met in Chengdu in March, Mao announced that he had not been personally involved in military decision making since the Korean War and that "this year I will come back to do some military [commanding] work."⁵⁶ All of these developments, as it soon turned out, would become the prelude to Mao's decision to shell Jinmen in summer 1958.

Why did Beijing harden its policy toward Taiwan in 1958? In exploring the causes, some scholars have referred to CCP leaders' frustration with Taipei's lack of positive response to their peace initiative in the previous two years. The more militant policy, these scholars argue, was designed to pressure the GMD to take the CCP's peace initiative more seriously.⁵⁷ Other scholars have focused their attention on Beijing's deepening confrontation with Washington. They point out that by late 1957 and early 1958, while the Chinese-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw (which began in 1955) had hit a deadlock, Beijing's leaders became alarmed by Washington's increasingly complicated military involvement in Taiwan following the signing of the U.S.-Taiwan mutual defense treaty. Consequently, Mao and his comrades found it necessary to "do something substantial" to probe Washington's real intention toward Taiwan, as well as to determine to what extent Washington was willing to commit to Taiwan's defense.⁵⁸

These interpretations make good sense as far as they go. But they do not take into consideration the profound connections between Beijing's changing policy toward Taiwan and the broader domestic and international environment in which Beijing's leaders formulated the policy. In order to understand the dynamics underlying Beijing's decision to shell Jinmen in summer 1958, the decision must be placed into the context of the emerging Great Leap Forward, one of the most important episodes in the development of Mao's continuous revolution. Indeed, as revealed by recently released Chinese evidence, the CCP leadership's handling of the Taiwan issue in 1958 was from the beginning shaped by the revolutionary zeal prevailing in Chinese political and social life during this unique moment in China's modern history.

Mao's revolutionary outburst began early in 1958, with the Chinese chairman using every opportunity to argue that the "revolutionary enthusiasm" of the masses was required to push China's "socialist revolution and reconstruction" to a higher level.⁵⁹ In the chairman's vision, the successful completion of the "socialist transformation" of China's industry, commerce, and agriculture in 1956 had already prepared conditions for Chinese society to enter a new stage in the Marxist order of socioeconomic development. By turning the Hundred Flowers Campaign into an Anti-Rightist movement in 1957, the chairman clearly revealed his determination to create a new wave of mass mobilization by manipulating China's "public opinion." At a series of conferences attended by top party leaders early in 1958, Mao fiercely criticized the mistakes of "opposing rash advance" committed by Zhou Enlai and others in 1956-57.⁶⁰ In the meantime, he repeatedly outlined the blueprint for building a Communist society in China, calling upon the whole party and the whole country to "do away with all fetishes and superstitions, and [to] defy laws both human and divine."⁶¹ Consequently, in summer 1958, Mao and the CCP leadership, formally announcing that "the realization of a Communist society in China is not far away," unleashed the Great Leap Forward throughout China's cities and countryside.

While China's political landscape was being rapidly transformed by this Maoist revolutionary discourse, Beijing's security concerns and foreign policies were also undergoing profound changes. In March, yielding to Mao's insistent pressure, Zhou Enlai criticized his handling of Chinese foreign policy in the 1954-58 period at the Chengdu conference. The premier admitted that in dealing with nationalist countries he had put too much emphasis on unity with them to the extent of neglecting the "necessary struggle" against the reactionary elements in these countries, and that he should have taken a more aggressive approach to struggle against capitalist/imperialist countries like Japan and the United States.⁶² Zhou then resigned from his post as China's foreign minister. When Marshal Chen Yi took over the Foreign Ministry, his first move was to follow Mao's instructions to convene a series of rectification meetings at the ministry aimed at "clearing up" the "rightist tendency" among members of the Chinese diplomatic service.⁶³

Against this background, in the spring and summer of 1958, Beijing initiated a series of diplomatic "offensives." As discussed in Chapter 3, when the Soviet leaders proposed to form a joint submarine flotilla with China and to establish a long-wave radio station on Chinese territory, Mao immediately characterized these proposals as indications of Moscow's "big-power chauvinism," throwing the leaders in the Kremlin on the defensive.⁶⁴ Early in May, after

two right-wing Japanese youth destroyed the PRC's flag at a Chinese exhibition in Nagasaki, Beijing's leaders quickly characterized this incident as a "serious imperialist plot" designed to attack the dignity and reputation of the People's Republic. In protest, Beijing decided to cancel all of China's trade and cultural exchanges with Japan, which led to further erosion of Beijing's already highly strained relations with Tokyo.⁶⁵ It was within the context of these "offensives" that Mao made the decision to shell Jinmen.

What should be emphasized is that the rapid radicalization of China's domestic and foreign policies reflected Mao's unique perception of the serious threats facing the People's Republic. Ironically, although Mao had repeatedly announced since late 1957 that "the East Wind has overwhelmed the West Wind" and that "while the enemy is becoming weaker everyday, we are getting stronger all the time,"⁶⁶ his sense of insecurity seems to have increased dramatically. On several occasions, the chairman fretted: "It is destined that our socialist revolution and reconstruction will not be smooth sailing. We should be prepared to deal with many serious threats facing us both internationally and domestically. As far as the international and domestic situations are concerned, although it is certain both are good in a general sense, it is also certain that many serious challenges are waiting for us. We must be prepared to deal with them."⁶⁷

It is apparent that Mao's concerns for China's security were not limited to the country's physical safety but were broader and more complicated. In order to fully comprehend the implications of Maoist rhetoric concerning China's security status, we must understand Mao's profound "postrevolution anxiety." According to Mao, the final goal of his revolution was the transformation of China's old state and society and the reassertion of China's central position in world affairs. For Mao, the Communist seizure of power in China represented the completion of only the first step in the "Long March" of the Chinese revolution. Since the PRC's establishment, Mao repeatedly warned his comrades that if the revolution was not constantly pushed forward, it would lose its momentum. Therefore, in Mao's vision, the threats to revolutionary China did not just come from without—such as from the imperialist/reactionary forces hostile to the People's Republic—but also from within, especially from the chronic decline of the revolutionary vigor on the part of party cadres and ordinary party members. For the chairman, how continuously to mobilize the party and the masses thus became a central issue in dealing with the threats that revolutionary China would have to face.⁶⁸ In 1958, when Mao was leading the whole party and the whole nation to begin the Great Leap Forward, he

found that the tension emerging in the Taiwan Strait provided him with much needed means to legitimize the unprecedented mass mobilization in China:

Besides its disadvantageous side, a tense [international] situation can mobilize the population, can particularly mobilize the backward people, can mobilize the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction. . . . Lenin once introduced this point in his discussions about war. Lenin said that a war could motivate people's spiritual condition, making it tense. Although there is no war right now, a tense situation caused by the current military confrontation can also bring about every positive factor.⁶⁹

Mao's statement is telling because it reveals that Beijing's decision to shell Jinmen was made not only to punish the GMD's lack of interest in the CCP's peace initiative or to probe Washington's intention in East Asia but also, and more importantly, to promote the extraordinary revolutionary outburst in China in 1958. The shelling served as a crucial means for Mao to mobilize the Chinese people to devote their innermost support to the Great Leap Forward. In retrospect, given the revolutionary atmosphere prevailing in Chinese society in 1958, it would have been inconceivable for Mao not to make Taiwan an outstanding security issue.

The Decision to Shell Jinmen

Although Mao had actively considered "taking major military actions" in the Taiwan Strait since early 1958,⁷⁰ not until July did he decide to conduct large-scale shelling of the Jinmen islands. What triggered the decision, interestingly, was the crisis emerging in the Middle East following American and British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan.

On 14 July, a group of young nationalist officers led by Abdel Karim Kasim staged a coup in Iraq, which resulted in the establishment of a new regime friendly to the socialist bloc. In response, U.S. marines landed on Lebanon and British paratroopers landed in Jordan the next day. Beijing angrily protested the U.S.-British intervention. While millions of ordinary Chinese held protest demonstrations and rallies in Beijing, Shanghai, and other major cities, the PRC government announced that it firmly opposed Washington's and London's imperialist behavior in the Middle East and supported the newly born Republic of Iraq.⁷¹

Beijing's protest was not confined to mere words. On 17 July, without consulting other top leaders in Beijing, Mao asked Peng Dehuai to convey the

following order to the PLA's General Staff: In response to the crisis situation in the Middle East, the air force should move into Fujian as soon as possible, the Fujian shore batteries should be prepared to shell Jinmen and blockade Jinmen's supply lines, and the General Staff should work out plans for conducting these operations immediately.⁷²

The next evening, Mao chaired a meeting attended by Beijing's top military planners to discuss how to carry out the shelling operation.⁷³ He told the participants that the U.S.-British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan had made the Middle East the focus of an international confrontation between progressive and reactionary forces. China's aid to the Arab people, claimed the chairman, should not be restricted to moral support but must be given "through taking practical actions." He announced that he had decided to use the PLA's shore batteries to shell GMD troops in Jinmen and Mazu. "The first wave," he instructed, "will include the firing of 100,000 to 200,000 shells, and will be followed by 1,000 shells every day for two to three months." The chairman said that he intended to make Jiang Jieshi the main target and, at the same time, try to gauge the strength of the Americans. He also reasoned that since Jinmen and Mazu were Chinese territories, and the shelling was a matter of China's internal affairs, the Americans could not use it as an excuse to strike back.⁷⁴

Late on the evening of 18 July, Peng Dehuai called a CMC meeting to work out more detailed plans to carry out Mao's order. It was decided that PLA's air force, unless hindered by bad weather, should move into the airfields in Fujian by 27 July to cover the shelling operation. In addition, more artillery units would be transferred to Fujian immediately to join the shore batteries already stationed there. The shelling would focus on Jinmen's harbor and GMD supply vessels, so that the islands' supply lines would be cut off. In making plans for the air force, Peng and his colleagues showed caution. They believed that the air force should restrict its operations to the airspace over the mainland and should never enter operations over open sea. The meeting participants also decided that the shelling of Jinmen would begin in one week, on 25 July.⁷⁵

The Chinese military machine was promptly put into motion after the meeting. At 11:00 P.M. on 18 July, the PLA General Staff relayed the CMC's order by security telephone to General Ye Fei, political commissar of the Fujian Military Region who, according to Mao's order, would assume the frontal commanding duty for the shelling operation. Ye immediately met with his staff to discuss how to implement the order. They decided to concentrate, by the evening of 24 July, thirty artillery battalions in the Xiamen area directed against Jinmen and another four artillery battalions in the Lianjiang area di-

rected against Mazu.⁷⁶ In the meantime, the air force decided that their air units would move into several Fujian and nearby eastern Guangdong airfields in two groups on 24 and 27 July, and that additional anti-aircraft artillery units and radar units would be dispatched to Fujian.⁷⁷ On 20 July, the naval headquarters ordered the units under its command to complete all preparations for operations in Fujian.⁷⁸

In the next several days, the railways and highways leading to the Fujian coast became jammed by large numbers of PLA artillery and other supporting units being transferred to the front. Despite the difficulties created by a severe typhoon on 21 July, Ye Fei was able to report to Mao and the CMC on 23 July that thirty-three artillery battalions had taken position on the Fujian coast, that about 50,000 artillery shells had been distributed among front units, with another 100,000 shells on their way, and that all other preparations would be completed by 24 July. Ye also summarized the Fujian Military Region's operation plans: "(1) We plan to use our artillery forces to conduct abrupt and fierce shelling of the enemy in Jinmen and Mazu simultaneously. (2) In terms of the targets of our artillery strike in Jinmen, we will concentrate on attacking the enemy's docks, artillery grounds, and important warehouses. (3) We will then be prepared to enter operations in the air and, at the same time, will use our shore batteries to blockade the enemy's ports and airfields, striking continuously the enemy's artillery forces and other reinforcements."⁷⁹ Although no landing operation was mentioned in these well-calculated plans, it is logical to conclude that the PLA would try to take over Jinmen and Mazu after significantly weakening the enemy's defense capacity and cutting off its supply lines.

As PLA units nearly completed their preparations on the Fujian front, top CCP leaders in Beijing postponed the deadline for the shelling operation twice. On 24 July, after learning that Taipei had dispatched two more divisions to Jinmen as reinforcements, Peng Dehuai proposed to Mao to change the deadline from 25 to 27 July, and Mao approved.⁸⁰ On the morning of 27 July, when Ye Fei and his staff were waiting for the final order from Beijing to commence the shelling, Mao decided to postpone the operation again. In a letter to Peng Dehuai and Huang Kecheng (a copy of which was simultaneously cabled to Ye Fei), the chairman stated:

I could not sleep and have thought about the question again. It seems more appropriate to hold the shelling on Jinmen for several more days. While holding our operations, we will observe the development of the situation. . . . We will wait until the other side launches a provocative attack and then

respond with our counterattack. The solution of the problem in the Middle East will take time. Since we have time, why should we be in a big hurry? We will hold our attack plan for the moment, but one day we will implement it. If the other side invades Zhangzhou, Shantou, Fuzhou, and Hangzhou, that is the best scenario. . . . It is extremely beneficial to have politics in a commanding position and to make a decision only after repeated deliberations. . . . Even if the other side attacks us, we still can wait for a few days to make clear calculations and then start our counterattack. . . . We must persist in the principle of fighting no battle we are not sure of winning.⁸¹

Why did Mao decide to put the shelling of Jinmen on hold at the last minute? One possible explanation was that the chairman was not certain if the PLA artillery units on the Fujian front had indeed reached full readiness, and that he knew that his air force would need more time to occupy the airfields in Fujian.⁸² As a longtime advocate of “never fighting a battle without being fully prepared,” the chairman must have felt it necessary to give the PLA more time to complete all preparations. The chairman also must have realized that the shelling would inevitably escalate the tension between China and the United States, and although he repeatedly claimed that he would never be scared by the American “paper tiger,” he would like to calculate possible American reactions more carefully.⁸³ Furthermore, given the emphasis he had placed upon the political impact of the shelling, it is possible that Mao hoped that the PLA’s military concentration in the coastal area might trigger a GMD preemptive military attack on the mainland (most likely by air bombardment), which would provide additional justification for the PLA to shell Jinmen and thus greatly enhance the shelling’s mobilization effect upon ordinary Chinese people.

In addition, Mao may have decided to postpone the shelling because Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was scheduled to visit Beijing in a few days to deal with a potential crisis recently emerging between Beijing and Moscow. In summer 1958 Moscow proposed to Beijing to establish a joint Soviet-Chinese submarine flotilla and a jointly owned long-wave radio station on the Chinese coast, which Beijing opposed immediately. On 22 July 1958, five days before Mao decided to postpone the shelling of Jinmen, he had a highly emotional talk with Pavel Yudin, Soviet ambassador to China, during which he criticized Moscow’s proposals as evidence of Soviet leaders’ “big-power chauvinism,” as well as their desire to control China.⁸⁴ Khrushchev, after receiving Yudin’s report, quickly decided to travel to Beijing to meet Mao. Although we have no way of knowing exactly how this turn of events might have influenced Mao’s

consideration of the Taiwan issue, one thing is certain: the Chinese chairman did not want to let the Soviet leader have any impact on his decision making on Taiwan. When Khrushchev was in Beijing from 31 July to 3 August, he had four substantial meetings with Mao and other Chinese leaders, but Mao never informed Khrushchev that the PLA was planning to shell Jinmen.⁸⁵ From the beginning, for Mao, the shelling was a challenge not just to Taipei and Washington but to Moscow’s domination of the international Communist movement as well.

Militarily speaking, Mao’s decision to postpone the shelling did give the PLA more time to complete pre-operation preparations. From 27 July to 13 August, several PLA air regiments successfully moved into airfields in Fujian and eastern Guangdong, thus establishing effective air coverage for the artillery and ground units that had taken position in Fujian.⁸⁶ In the meantime, PLA field commanders in Fujian gained more time to establish better communications and logistical support for their troops.⁸⁷ From Mao’s perspective, though, prolonging the preparations gave him more opportunity to contemplate the shelling’s possible consequences, especially Washington’s likely reaction. Indeed, as we shall see, how to avoid a direct confrontation with the Americans became a main concern for Mao when he made the final decision to shell Jinmen.

Mao’s decision to postpone the shelling operation, however, also confused some of his own commanders. By mid-August, since they had not received further orders from Mao, top PLA commanders began to believe that the chairman meant to call off the shelling operation or postpone it indefinitely. On 13 August, Peng Dehuai instructed the Operation Department under the General Staff that if the American/GMD side did not initiate any military activity in the next few days, the shelling operation in Fujian should be called off and the PLA units there should return to “normal status.” On 19 August, the General Staff formally notified the Fujian Military Region that the “combat readiness” status on the Fujian front had been lifted.⁸⁸

At this point, though, Mao was actually ready to execute the shelling plan. Beginning on 17 August, the CCP leadership convened an enlarged politburo conference at Beidaihe, a summer sea resort for top CCP leaders, to discuss how to propel the Great Leap Forward into its most radical phase: the communization of China’s rural population and the militarization of the entire Chinese workforce (that is, the commencement of the nationwide “everyone a soldier” campaign). Although the Jinmen issue originally was not on the meeting’s agenda, on the first day of the conference, Mao suddenly announced that he had decided to shell Jinmen.⁸⁹ Mao then offered one of the most outspoken statements he had given during the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis to justify

his decision, emphasizing that, as far as its mobilization effect is concerned, international tension was not a bad thing at all:

In our propaganda, we say that we oppose tension and strive for détente, as if détente is to our advantage [and] tension is to their [the West's] advantage. [But] can we or can't we look at [the situation] the other way around: is tension to our comparative advantage [and] to the West's disadvantage? Tension is to the West's advantage only in that they can increase military production, and it is to our advantage in that it will mobilize all [our] positive forces. . . . Tension can [help] gain membership for Communist parties in different countries. [It] can [help] us increase steel as well as grain [production]. . . . To have an enemy in front of us, to have tension, is to our advantage.⁹⁰

No statement could be more revealing about Mao's intentions. Following this singular logic, Mao acted to create an enemy. Early on the morning of 18 August, he personally wrote a letter to Peng Dehuai, telling the defense minister to "prepare to shell Jinmen now, dealing with Jiang [Jieshi] directly and the Americans indirectly." The chairman also asked Peng to "call the air force headquarters' attention to the possibility that the Taiwan side might counter-attack us by dispatching large numbers of aircraft (dozens, or even one hundred planes) to try to take back air control over Jinmen and Mazu." "[I]f this happens," he instructed Peng, "we should prepare to use large numbers of our air units to defeat them immediately." Demonstrating his willingness to maintain a balance between strategic aggressiveness and tactical cautiousness, the chairman advised the defense minister that "in chasing them, our planes should not cross the space line over Jinmen and Mazu."⁹¹ After being put on hold for more than three weeks, the shelling operation was again activated.

Two days later, Mao further defined the operation's scope and objective. He reduced the operation's size from what he had planned one month before, deciding that intensive shelling would be conducted only toward the Jinmen islands, but not Mazu. He also made it clear that the shelling's main goal was to isolate the GMD troops on Jinmen, cutting them off from supplies. He also clarified that he intended to take over Jinmen, although not necessarily through a landing operation. "After a period of shelling," the chairman pointed out, "the other side might withdraw its troops from Jinmen and Mazu, or might continue to struggle in spite of huge difficulties. Then, whether or not we will conduct landing operations will be determined by the specific situation at that time. We should take one step and watch to take the next step."⁹²

Mao's main concern was how the United States would respond to the shell-

ing. In a general sense, Mao did not believe that Washington would intervene militarily for the sake of Jinmen and other GMD-controlled offshore islands; nor did he anticipate that the shelling on Jinmen would result in a general war between China and the United States.⁹³ But as an experienced military strategist, he had been accustomed to "striving for the best while preparing for the worst," and he thus needed to have contingency plans in hand. Consequently, before he gave his orders, Mao talked to his field commanders in person. Late on 20 August, the General Staff telephoned Ye Fei, who had been waiting for Mao's final order since late July, instructing him to fly immediately to Beidaihe to meet with Mao.⁹⁴ Ye arrived at Mao's quarters on the afternoon of 21 August, and the meeting was also attended by Marshals Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao. After Ye reported to Mao in detail the situation on the Fujian front, the chairman abruptly asked: "You use so many cannons in the shelling, is it possible that some Americans would be killed?" Ye, knowing that there were American advisers in Jinmen, replied that it was possible. Mao also asked: "Is it possible that you might avoid hitting the Americans?" Ye said that it was impossible. Mao did not ask another question before peremptorily adjourning the meeting. The next day Mao again summoned Ye to his quarters and told him that even though the shelling might result in the deaths of Americans, it should go on. And in order to assure that the central leadership, and Mao in particular, would directly control the shelling the chairman ordered Ye to stay in Beidaihe to command the operations by telephone.⁹⁵

The fact that Mao made the final decision in mid- and late August to begin the shelling is highly revealing. By that time, the tension in the Middle East had already been greatly reduced—since early August, Washington and London had recognized the new nationalist government in Iraq, and they both had begun to withdraw their troops from Lebanon and Jordan. As a result, Mao's main original reason to shell Jinmen—"to support the people in the Middle East"—was no longer a valid justification for the decision. The logical interpretation, as will be discussed below, can only be that he was driven by domestic political considerations.

On the morning of 23 August, all PLA units in Fujian entered a "first-class alert of operation readiness." At the PLA's frontline headquarters in Xiamen, General Zhang Yixiang, the vice commander of the Fujian Military Region who had been assigned the frontal commanding duty during Ye Fei's absence, maintained constant telephone communication with Ye in Beidaihe. After almost a whole day's waiting, at around 5:20 P.M., Zhang received the order from Mao via Ye that the shelling should start at 5:30 P.M. Ten minutes later, a large-scale barrage of the Jinmen islands began.⁹⁶

The Shelling and the Crisis

The PLA's intensive bombardment of Jinmen on 23 August touched off a major international crisis. Although the Eisenhower administration was not caught entirely off guard by the shelling since for weeks American officials had observed Beijing's massive military buildup in Fujian and had formulated various contingency plans, policymakers in Washington were not certain about Beijing's intentions.⁹⁷ Fearing that the shelling could be a prelude to a major invasion of the GMD-controlled offshore islands or even Taiwan itself, President Eisenhower ordered U.S. forces in East Asia to enter "readiness alert" for war operations. To enhance American naval strength in the Taiwan Strait, he ordered two aircraft carrier groups (recently deployed in the Middle East during the crisis over Iraq and Lebanon) to sail to East Asia. In the meantime, Washington expedited the shipment of all kinds of military equipment and ammunition, including the deadly Sidewinder air-to-air missile, to Taiwan.⁹⁸ Indeed, as historian Gordon H. Chang points out: "Within days the United States had assembled off the Chinese coast the most powerful armada the world had ever seen."⁹⁹

These developments did not come as a surprise to Mao, since one of his main purposes was to stir up international tension on his own terms. On the evening of 23 August, Mao called a Politburo Standing Committee meeting at Beidaihe and delivered a long and comprehensive speech, divulging his understanding of the international impact of the shelling. According to Wu Lengxi, who attended the meeting as director of the Xinhua News Agency and one of Mao's political secretaries, the chairman was in very high spirits. He first explained why he chose 23 August for the barrage. The chairman pointed out that just three days earlier the UN Assembly had passed a resolution requesting that American and British troops withdraw from Lebanon and Jordan, a request that, in his view, made "American occupation of Taiwan look even more unjust than before," thus making the timing perfect for beginning shelling on Jinmen. In elaborating what he saw as the purpose of the shelling operation, the chairman stressed: "Our demand is that American armed forces withdraw from Taiwan, and Jiang's troops withdraw from Jinmen and Mazu. If they do not do so, we will attack. Taiwan is too far away to be bombed, so we shell Jinmen and Mazu. This will surely produce a shock wave in the world. Not only will the Americans be shocked but the Asians and the Europeans will be shocked too. The people in the Arab world will be delighted, and the vast masses in Asia and Africa will take our side."¹⁰⁰

As he did on so many other occasions in the summer of 1958, the chairman again explained how international tension could be beneficial to China's con-

tinuous revolution. He told Wu Lengxi that the Chinese media should continue to propagandize that China opposed the international tension created by the imperialists and was in favor of relaxing international tension. However, stressed the chairman, his real belief was that "all bad things have two sides." While "international tension is certainly a bad thing, there is a good side of it: it will bring about the awakening of many people, and will make them determined to fight against the imperialists."¹⁰¹

During the course of his long talk, the chairman stated that the bombardment of Jinmen was also meant to "teach the Americans a lesson." "The Americans have bullied us for many years," claimed the chairman, "so now that we have a chance, why not give them a hard time?" He emphasized that "the Americans started a fire in the Middle East, and we are now starting a fire in the Far East." In his opinion, "we did not put the Americans in the wrong; they did it by themselves—they have stationed several thousand troops on Taiwan, plus two air force bases there." Beijing should observe how the international community, and especially the Americans, respond to the shelling operation, the chairman continued, and "then we will decide on our next move."¹⁰²

Fighting continued in the Taiwan Strait area on 24 August. In addition to inflicting another day of the fierce artillery bombardment (about 10,000 rounds were fired), the PLA navy dispatched six torpedo boats to attack several GMD supply ships off the Jinmen port. It was reported that one GMD ship, *Zhonghai*, was severely damaged, and another one, *Taisheng*, was sunk.¹⁰³ In retaliation, the GMD used forty-eight F-86 fighters to attack the PLA air force the next afternoon, leading to a major air battle over the Fujian coast. The outcome of the battle has become a myth since each side claimed that it had won a victory.¹⁰⁴

As the conflict in the Taiwan Strait escalated, Mao called another Politburo Standing Committee meeting on the afternoon of 25 August, specifically devoted to the discussion of Washington's reaction and Beijing's next move.¹⁰⁵ Again the chairman dominated the meeting. Beginning his talk by joking that "now we are taking our summer vacation here at Beidaihe, but we have made the Americans extremely nervous," the chairman told the participants that, according to his observations, Washington was worried that the PLA not only would land on Jinmen and Mazu but also would attack Taiwan itself. "In reality," commented the chairman, "although we have fired dozens of thousands of rounds on Jinmen, we only mean to probe [the Americans' intention]. We will not say if we are, or if we are not, going to land on Jinmen. We will be doubly cautious and will act in accordance with the situation." The chairman further clarified that he was taking such a cautious attitude not be-

cause there were 95,000 GMD troops stationed on Jinmen islands but because he needed to assess the attitude of the American government. "Washington has signed a treaty of mutual defense with Taiwan, but it does not clearly spell out whether or not the U.S. defense perimeter includes Jinmen and Mazu." Thus, Mao continued, "we need to see if the Americans want to carry these islands on their backs." In the chairman's opinion, the best way to deal with the Americans at the moment was to keep them guessing. Thus Mao directed the Chinese media not to link U.S. actions in the Middle East directly with the PLA's bombardment of Jinmen for the moment, but rather to criticize Washington's "imperialist behavior" in broad terms, including its "occupation of China's Taiwan." "We should build up our strength and store up our energy, that is, draw the bow but not discharge the arrow," concluded the chairman.¹⁰⁶

In response to Mao's vague instructions, the planners at Beijing's General Staff headquarters spent the whole evening of 25 August working out what specific strategy the PLA's three services in Fujian should take in the next few days. On 26 August, Peng Dehuai, with Mao's approval, summarized the planners' conclusions in a telegram to Vice Commander Zhang Yixiang: The artillery forces should do everything possible to isolate the Jinmen islands, cutting off communications between Big Jinmen and Small Jinmen and between the Jinmen islands and Taiwan, while destroying airstrips at the Jinmen airport; the navy should strengthen attacks on the GMD's small and middle-size vessels; and the air force should guarantee the defense of the mainland's airspace by repulsing any air attack the GMD might launch against targets on the mainland, and in no circumstance should the air force engage in fighting outside the mainland's airspace.¹⁰⁷ It is apparent that Beijing's military strategy now concentrated on strangling the Jinmen islands rather than landing on them directly, with eventually seizing Jinmen, Mazu, and other GMD-controlled offshore islands as the operation's objective.

In an international crisis, the big picture sometimes can be changed by a small incident. On 24 and 27 August, the PLA's Fujian frontline radio station, without Beijing's authorization, announced that "our army's landing operation is imminent" and called on the GMD troops to surrender and "join the great cause of liberating Taiwan."¹⁰⁸ Policymakers in Washington, as well as the Western media, immediately took this provocative message as evidence that Beijing was about to launch an amphibious landing operation against Jinmen. The same day, for the first time since the crisis began, the U.S. State Department publicly announced that the GMD-controlled offshore islands such as Jinmen and Mazu were vital to the defense of Taiwan itself.¹⁰⁹

Beijing's leaders were alarmed by Washington's statement since it revealed

that, with any mistake, the shelling of Jinmen could turn from a CCP-GMD conflict into a direct Chinese-American military showdown. This prospect was unacceptable to Mao. No matter how provocative the chairman had been toward the United States in internal speeches and open propaganda, what he really wanted was, to borrow a phrase from the political scientist Thomas Christensen, "a conflict short of war."¹¹⁰ After learning of the contents of the Fujian radio station's broadcast from *Cankao ziliao* (an internally circulated journal by the Xinhua News Agency that published translations of Western news reports on a daily basis), Mao "lost [his] temper." He sternly criticized this "serious mistake," reemphasizing that no one should comment on issues related to the Taiwan Strait crisis without Beijing's approval.¹¹¹

In the face of a greater American military threat in the Taiwan Strait, Mao needed to adjust Beijing's strategies. He wanted to continue the military pressure on GMD troops in Jinmen, but his attention increasingly turned to using other measures to contain the danger in direct American intervention. One was announcing the limits of the PRC's territorial water.

Right after the shelling of Jinmen began, Mao had instructed the Foreign Ministry and the General Staff to study how best to define the boundaries of China's territorial water. At the end of August, Mao decided that the time for a decision had come.¹¹² On 1 and 2 September, Mao chaired a two-day Politburo Standing Committee meeting, which was also attended by several international law experts from the Foreign Ministry, to discuss the issue. Although the experts believed that the limits should be set up at three nautical miles from the coastline, Mao and other top CCP leaders, for political and strategic considerations, decided that the limits should be established at twelve miles.¹¹³

On 4 September, Beijing formally established the PRC's territorial waters at twelve nautical miles and declared that no foreign military aircraft or naval vessels would be allowed to cross the boundary without Beijing's permission.¹¹⁴ In Zhou Enlai's words, this declaration was made at this particular moment to "prevent American military vessels from coming close to the Jinmen islands, which were situated well within the twelve-mile zone of China's territorial water."¹¹⁵ In the meantime, in order to observe Washington's responses, Mao ordered the PLA to stop shelling GMD targets for three days.¹¹⁶

The "Noose Strategy"

Beijing's leaders did not have to wait long for Washington's response. The same day that Beijing announced the extent of its territorial water, U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles, after meeting with President Eisenhower, issued a statement on the Taiwan Strait crisis. He emphasized that "[t]he

United States is bound by treaty to help defend Taiwan (Formosa) from armed attack” and that “we have recognized that the securing and protecting of Quemoy [Jinmen] and Matsu [Mazu] have increasingly become related to the defense of Taiwan.” In the same statement, Dulles also indicated that Washington was willing to resume the ambassadorial talks with Beijing in order to reach an agreement on “mutual and reciprocal renunciation of force” in the Taiwan Strait.¹¹⁷ Dulles’s statement, along with Washington’s subsequent announcement that the Seventh Fleet would begin escorting GMD supply vessels to Jinmen, brought the Taiwan Strait crisis to a crucial juncture. Now Beijing’s leaders had to face the tough reality that if the shelling on Jinmen went out of control, a direct military confrontation with the United States could follow. Within this framework, Mao introduced his “noose strategy.”

When Dulles’s statement reached Beijing, Mao was chairing a Politburo Standing Committee meeting to discuss the new situation in the Taiwan Strait, focusing on analyzing Washington’s intentions. Mao emphasized that it seemed to him that the Americans were afraid of fighting a war, and it was unlikely that they would engage in a major war for Jinmen. Zhou Enlai pointed out that the current world situation was different from that of the Korean War period, and none of the U.S. allies—such as Britain, Japan, and the Philippines—would support American military action in the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, claimed Zhou, the U.S. government would be unwilling to use military means to end the crisis. The meeting participants concluded that although the Americans certainly would help the GMD defend Taiwan, it was doubtful that they would help defend Jinmen and Mazu as well.¹¹⁸

Participants of the meeting believed that the shelling of Jinmen had already successfully probed Washington’s intentions toward Taiwan and the offshore islands, as well as mobilized the people in the world. Regarding Beijing’s future strategy, Mao pointed out that now was the time to turn Jinmen into a “noose” for Washington by not landing on Jinmen but putting more pressure on the Americans. When American ships entered China’s newly established territorial water, the chairman asserted, they should first be warned to leave, and, then, if they refused to leave, “due measures should be taken.” The chairman was also prepared to return to the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, thus “employing the diplomatic means to coordinate the fighting on the Fujian front”; at the same time, he stressed, Beijing should further mobilize the people in the whole country through a big propaganda campaign centered on condemning America’s “interference with China’s internal affairs.”¹¹⁹

On 5 and 8 September, Mao made two speeches at the Fifteenth Meeting of the Supreme State Council, in which he explained in particular what he

meant by using a “noose strategy” to deal with the Americans. The chairman repeatedly stressed that international tension was more a “good thing” than a “bad thing” because it would help mobilize the people both in China and in the world, that Washington feared Beijing more than Beijing feared Washington, and that, in the final analysis, “the East Wind has overwhelmed the West Wind.” Within this context, the chairman claimed that Jinmen and Taiwan, like many other places in the world where the United States had military bases, were “nooses” for the United States:

At present, America has committed itself to an “all-round responsibility” policy along our coast. It seems to me that the Americans will only feel comfortable if they take complete responsibility for Jinmen and Mazu, or even for such small islands as Dadan, Erdan, and Dongding [small islands within the Jinmen archipelago]. America has fallen into our noose. Thereby, America’s neck is hanging in China’s iron noose. Although Taiwan is [for America] another noose, it is a bit farther from [the mainland]. America is now moving its head closer to us, since it wants to take responsibility for Jinmen and other islands. Someday we will kick America, and it cannot run away, because it is tied up by our noose.¹²⁰

Despite Mao’s provocative language, his “noose strategy” did not represent any significant escalation of Beijing’s belligerence toward Washington. Behind Mao’s radical rhetoric and metaphorical language lurked cunning and careful calculations. He understood that the American military presence in the Taiwan Strait made it impossible for Beijing to “liberate Taiwan” through military means and that it would be necessary to deal with the Americans at the negotiation table. But, to prevent the negotiations from jeopardizing the mobilization effect he hoped to achieve through the shelling of Jinmen, he figured that a dramatic propaganda campaign, with a provocative concept as its central symbol, had to be introduced. In other words, the primary designated audience of the “noose strategy” was not the Americans but China’s ordinary people. Not surprising at all, when millions of Chinese were told that Jinmen and Mazu had become “nooses” for the Americans and were holding anti-American demonstrations and rallies throughout China, Mao was turning his attention to the diplomatic front and preparing to negotiate with the Americans.

“Dancing” with Moscow, Negotiating with Washington

On 6 September, Zhou Enlai issued a formal response to Dulles’s statement of two days earlier. The Chinese premier sternly condemned Washington’s

"policy of aggression" in the Taiwan Strait and "continuous intervention in China's internal affairs." He reiterated that it was within China's sovereignty for Beijing to use military means to deal with the GMD's "sabotage and harassment activities." But Zhou also stated that Beijing would make a distinction between the "international dispute between China and the United States in the Taiwan Strait" and the "internal matter of the Chinese people's efforts to liberate Taiwan," and thus was willing to "sit down at the negotiation table with the Americans to discuss how to relax and eliminate the tension in the Taiwan Strait."¹²¹

The timing of Zhou's statement was probably related to a secret visit to Beijing by the Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko. Since the beginning of the shelling on Jinmen, Beijing had kept Moscow in the dark about the plans for the operation. Dulles's 4 September statement and the prospect of a Sino-American clash in the Taiwan Strait alarmed the leaders in Moscow. On 5 September, Khrushchev personally telephoned Beijing's leaders, informing them that he intended to dispatch Gromyko to China.¹²² The next day, Zhou Enlai met with N. G. Sudarikov, a counselor at the Soviet embassy in China. The Soviet diplomat informed Zhou that Khrushchev was planning to send a message to Eisenhower regarding the Taiwan Strait crisis, and the major goal of Gromyko's visit was to inform Beijing's leaders of the message and to "exchange opinions on this matter." Zhou, for the first time since the outbreak of the Taiwan Strait crisis, explained to the Soviets Beijing's aims in conducting the shelling. Zhou emphasized that by shelling Jinmen, Beijing meant to have the Americans "get stuck" in Taiwan, "just as they have 'gotten stuck' in the Middle East and Near East." The shelling, according to Zhou, would also cause "more acute contradictions" between Jiang Jieshi and Dulles, as well as "prove to the Americans that the People's Republic of China is strong and bold enough and is not afraid of America." The shelling's domestic aim, Zhou continued, was "to raise the combat spirit of our people and their readiness for war, to enhance their feeling of not being afraid of war and their hatred toward American imperialism and its aggressive, insolent foreign policy."¹²³ Zhou stated that the shelling of Jinmen and Mazu would not be followed by a landing operation on the GMD-controlled offshore islands, let alone on Taiwan. In particular, Zhou promised that Beijing would take full responsibility for its own behavior and would not "drag the Soviet Union into the water" if "big trouble" resulted from the shelling.¹²⁴

Gromyko arrived in Beijing on the morning of 6 September and met with Zhou Enlai at 2 P.M. the same day. At the beginning of the meeting, Zhou gave Gromyko a copy of the statement he had issued that day, and the Soviet foreign

minister presented to Zhou a draft letter Khrushchev was preparing to send to Eisenhower. With Gromyko's prodding, Zhou again explained Beijing's aims and plans regarding Taiwan, basically repeating what he had told Sudarikov the day before. Gromyko stated that "the CC CPSU is in full support of the stand and measures taken by the Chinese comrades." He also mentioned that Zhou's statement and Khrushchev's letter to Eisenhower represented "two important actions that are highly compatible and mutually supplementary on the diplomatic front."¹²⁵ At 6:30 P.M. Gromyko met with Mao. He again expressed Moscow's support for the "stand, policies, and measures" Beijing had taken during the Taiwan Strait crisis. In addition, he emphasized that Khrushchev's letter to Eisenhower would send a "serious warning" to the Americans, which should make the Americans calm down, "as if they had taken a cold bath."¹²⁶ Mao found that "ninety percent" of Khrushchev's message to Eisenhower was "correct" and only "a few points may need to be further discussed."¹²⁷ With Beijing's consent, Khrushchev sent the letter to Eisenhower on 7 September, warning Washington that an attack on China "is an attack on the Soviet Union" and that Moscow would "do everything" to defend both countries.¹²⁸

Behind this open demonstration of solidarity between Beijing and Moscow, the Sino-Soviet schism that had emerged after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization widened. According to Soviet documentary records and Gromyko's recollections, how to deal with Washington's nuclear threat was an important topic the Soviet foreign minister discussed with both Zhou and Mao. Zhou told Gromyko: "Inflicting blows on the offshore islands, the PRC has taken into consideration the possibility of the outbreak in this region of a local war between the United States and the PRC, and it is now ready to take all the hard blows, including atomic bombs and the destruction of its cities." The Chinese premier advised the Soviet foreign minister that the Soviet Union should not take part in the Sino-American war "even if the Americans used tactical nuclear weapons." Only if Washington resorted to using "larger nuclear weapons" and risked broadening the war "should the Soviet Union respond with a nuclear counterstrike."¹²⁹ In his memoirs, Gromyko recorded a similar conversation with Mao. The Chinese chairman, according to Gromyko, stated that if the Americans were to invade the Chinese mainland or to use nuclear weapons, the Chinese forces would retreat, drawing American ground forces into China's interior. The chairman proposed that during the initial stage of the war, the Soviets should do nothing but watch. Only after the American forces had entered China's interior should Moscow use "all means at its disposal" (which Gromyko understood as Soviet nuclear weapons) to destroy them.¹³⁰

Although China's official account of the conversation angrily rebutted Gromyko's story after it was first published in 1988, claiming it to be a "serious distortion of the historical truth,"¹³¹ I believe that both Mao and Zhou had made these statements concerning the danger of a nuclear war since both remarks were consistent with Mao's own philosophy and view on this issue. Since the mid-1950s, Mao had repeatedly expressed his unique views on the destructive effects of nuclear weapons, claiming that "even if the American atom bombs were so powerful that, when all dropped on China, they would make a hole right through the earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole, although it might be a major event for the solar system."¹³² For Mao, the discussion concerned not a strategic matter but rather a philosophical issue. With a profound belief that "history is on our side," Mao, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, often adopted a very special definition of space and time in discussions of important policy and strategic issues, referring to the universe (or "all under the heaven"—*Tianxia* in Chinese) and "ten thousand years" as the basic scale in measuring the grand mission of his revolution. Within this context, Mao would often describe nuclear weapons as nothing but a "paper tiger." Mao's unconventional attitude toward nuclear weapons had already scared many of his Communist comrades in other parts of the world (especially at the summit of Communist leaders in Moscow in November 1957); this time, he alarmed his comrades from Moscow.¹³³

Despite Mao's belligerent rhetoric, Beijing acted cautiously toward American participation in the GMD's supply convoys to Jinmen. During the early days of the shelling, Beijing issued a strict order to PLA units on the Fujian front that they should not take any action toward the Americans without Beijing's authorization.¹³⁴ On 7 September—when, for the first time since the outbreak of the crisis, American ships were involved in escorting GMD supply vessels to Jinmen—the PRC Foreign Ministry issued a "serious warning" to Washington, but the PLA's shore batteries maintained complete silence.¹³⁵ Actually, Beijing's leaders were carefully considering how to respond to this new development, taking into account all possible contingencies. They finally reached a decision close to midnight and sent the following order to the Fujian Frontal Headquarters:

- (1) Our artillery units on the Xiamen front should conduct another punitive barrage on important GMD military targets at Jinmen. The strike should be both accurate and fierce. The scale of the barrage should be larger than that of 23 August with a plan to fire about 300,000 rounds.
- (2) Concerning American military ships' action of escorting Jiang's vessels

and invading our territorial water, the spokesman of our Foreign Ministry has already issued a warning. If the American ships come again, we will issue another warning. After these two warnings, if the American ships continue to invade our territorial water to escort Jiang's ships, we will concentrate the strength of our artillery force and navy to bombard Jiang's vessels stationed in the Liaolowan beach [of the Big Jinmen]. However, no strike should be aimed at American ships.¹³⁶

The order puzzled the PLA's front commanders since they could not figure out how their units, in a long-distance artillery bombardment of the mixed American-GMD convoy, might manage to hit only GMD vessels. Ye Fei, who had returned from Beidaihe to resume the command post in Fujian late in August, personally called Mao seeking clarification. When he asked if he should order the firing in the event that American and GMD ships were mixed together, Mao said, "Yes." He then asked if he could strike both American and GMD ships. Mao replied: "No, only strike the GMD but not the Americans." He also asked if he could retaliate if the Americans opened fire first. Again, Mao said, "No." The chairman also instructed Ye to report the position, composition, and direction of the mixed GMD-American convoy at least once every hour and not to open fire until he received the final order from Beijing.¹³⁷ When another joint GMD-American convoy approached Jinmen the next day, Ye strictly followed Mao's orders. When he ordered firing, to his surprise, he found he only needed to deal with the GMD because all American ships were staying at least three miles offshore to avoid exchanges with the PLA's shore batteries.¹³⁸

Mao's insistence that the PLA avoid hitting American ships reflected not only his caution in dealing with Washington in a military situation but also the emergence of a new focus in Beijing's management of the Taiwan crisis: while the seizure of Jinmen and other offshore islands remained one of Mao's key goals, his main attention had moved from the military conflict in Jinmen to the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, which, after being suspended for more than nine months, would soon resume.

The Sino-American ambassadorial talks first opened in Geneva in August 1955, serving as the only channel of communication between Beijing and Washington. In December 1957, the meetings were suspended when the American negotiator, Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, was reassigned to Thailand and the Chinese refused to accept his replacement, Edwin Martin, because he was not an ambassador.¹³⁹ On 30 June, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement, demanding that Washington appoint an ambassadorial negotiator in fifteen days; if Washington did not comply, Beijing would regard the talks

as being terminated by the American side.¹⁴⁰ Washington, though missing the fifteen-day deadline to name a new negotiator, announced on 28 July that the U.S. ambassador to Poland, Jacob Beam, had been appointed as the American representative to the talks, which would be moved to Warsaw.

As soon as the shelling on Jinmen began, Mao started formulating Beijing's strategy for the ambassadorial talks. Late in August, he recalled Ambassador Wang Bingnan, the chief Chinese negotiator at the bilateral talks. Two days after Wang arrived in Beijing, he attended a politburo meeting to brief top party leaders on the progress of the ambassadorial talks from 1955 to 1957. At this meeting and then during a private talk with Wang, Mao demonstrated a keen interest in knowing if Washington could be persuaded to force the GMD to withdraw from the offshore islands through the ambassadorial talks.¹⁴¹ Before Wang left for Warsaw on 10 September, he received a five-point draft proposal and a signed letter from Zhou Enlai. In addition to reiterating that Taiwan and the offshore islands were Chinese territory and that the Taiwan issue belonged to China's internal affairs, the proposal included two new points. First, in order to "remove the immediate threat" Jinmen and Mazu posed to Xiamen and Fuzhou, Beijing proposed that if "GMD troops are willing to withdraw from the islands on their own initiative, the PRC government will not pursue them." Second, after the PRC government had recovered Jinmen, Mazu, and other offshore islands, it would "strive to liberate Taiwan and Penghu by peaceful means and [would], in a certain period, avoid using force to liberate Taiwan and Penghu."¹⁴² These two points represented a major concession on Beijing's part because, if Washington accepted them, Beijing would be obliged to give up use of force as a means to liberate Taiwan. Zhou Enlai's letter provided detailed instructions on the tactics Wang should follow:

Here are the main points of your presentation (draft). At the first meeting, if the Americans are eager to present their opinions, you may let them speak first. . . . If the Americans present their proposal first and if there are some parts in it that are worth our consideration, you should not hurriedly present our proposal but should comment on the ridiculous parts in the American proposal and wait to give a comprehensive response to the other parts at the next meeting. If the American side does not present anything concrete and is eager to learn about our opinion, you may use the points drafted here and present the proposal we have prepared.¹⁴³

The new Chinese stand demonstrated that Mao was now willing to bring the Taiwan Strait crisis to an end through negotiating with the Americans. Mao triggered the crisis himself in the first place, so he could have ended it

easily—for example, just by ordering the PLA to lift the siege of Jinmen—if he had wanted to do so. But Mao needed the crisis to end in a way that would allow him to claim a great victory. This was particularly important for Mao since the shelling of Jinmen was central to promoting his Great Leap Forward. He also knew that profound differences in opinion existed between Taipei and Washington, so he believed it possible to "persuade" the Americans to force the GMD to withdraw from Jinmen and other offshore islands.¹⁴⁴

At the same time that Beijing was preparing to resume the ambassadorial talks with Washington, Zhou Enlai began to explore the possibility of reestablishing contacts with Jiang and the GMD in Taiwan. On 8 and 10 September, the premier twice met with Cao Juren, who had served as a messenger between Beijing and Taipei since 1956. Zhou asked Cao to tell the GMD leaders that they had three options in Jinmen: first, they could "live and die together with the islands"; second, they could "withdraw the whole force back to Taiwan"; and third, they could "be forced by the Americans to withdraw." Zhou commented that the second option should be the best for Jiang, since the GMD troops on the offshore islands accounted for almost one-third of Jiang's whole military strength, and "by withdrawing them back to Taiwan, Jiang will have more capital to bargain with the Americans." Zhou also asked Cao to inquire of the GMD leaders: "If the Americans can openly negotiate with us, why cannot the CCP and the GMD also begin another round of open negotiations?"¹⁴⁵

Wang Bingnan returned to Warsaw on 11 September, and, in two days, he and Beam had agreed that the ambassadorial talks would reopen on 15 September at the Swiss embassy. At that moment, however, Mao changed his mind again about how to proceed with the talks. By then the chairman had left Beijing for an inspection tour in the South. On 13 September he wrote a two-part letter to Zhou Enlai and Huang Kecheng from Wuchang. In the first part of the letter, the chairman ordered the PLA artillery units in Fujian, in addition to bombarding GMD ships "entering the Liaolowan harbor to unload supplies," to also begin "sporadic shelling (by firing 200 to 300 rounds a day)" on Jinmen's military targets, in order to make "the enemy panicky and restless day and night." In the second part of the letter, the chairman dictated a new negotiation strategy at Warsaw: "As far as the Warsaw talks are concerned, in the next three to four days, or one week, [we] should not lay out all of our cards on the table at once but should first test [the attitudes of the Americans]." He also predicted that it was "unlikely that the other side would lay out all of their cards at once, and they will try to test us as well."¹⁴⁶

Mao's letter reflected his calculations at both tactical and strategic levels. In a tactical sense, the chairman, himself a longtime player of all kinds of power

games, fully understood that unless his representative was able to speak from a position of strength at the negotiation table, the Americans would not easily make concessions. Therefore, the shelling of Jinmen needed to be continued in ways new and disturbing to the enemy. In a strategic sense, the last thing Mao wanted to do was to create the impression that Beijing had significantly softened its stand on Taiwan. To do so, from Mao's perspective, would be extremely harmful to the revolutionary reputation Mao had persistently strived to create for the PRC abroad, and, especially, to the huge political mobilization effect Mao had managed to initiate through the shelling campaign at home.

Although Zhou Enlai informed Mao in a note dated 13 September that, after receiving Mao's letter, he had instructed Wang Bingnan to "go around with the Americans to force them to lay out all of their cards first,"¹⁴⁷ Wang, for whatever reason, failed to act in accordance with Mao's new instructions. When the ambassadorial talks reopened on 15 September, Beam, the American negotiator, argued for an immediate cease-fire in the Taiwan Strait before any other issue could be discussed. Wang asked for a ten-minute recess and then presented Beijing's five-point proposal. Beam immediately countered that the Americans could not "entertain" the proposal because it "would mean surrender of territory" belonging to an American ally.¹⁴⁸ The next day, Dulles publicly announced that immediate cease-fire was the first step toward resolving the Taiwan Strait crisis.

Mao flew into a rage when he received the reports about Wang's performance. In the chairman's view, Wang exposed what was supposed to be Beijing's bottom line on the first day of the negotiations, thus making the Americans think that Beijing was vulnerable. The chairman commented: "Wang Bingnan is worse than a pig; even a pig knows to how turn around when it hits the wall, and Wang Bingnan does not know how to turn around after he hits the wall."¹⁴⁹ He intended to fire Wang immediately. Only after Zhou Enlai "took the responsibility" for Wang's mistakes and pointed out that firing Wang would cause more confusion did Mao decide to keep him in Warsaw.¹⁵⁰

But this episode had already completely changed Mao's view of and, as a result, strategies toward the ambassadorial talks. Instead of regarding the talks as a chance to bring about acceptable solutions to the crisis in the Taiwan Strait, Mao now firmly believed that he had no other choice but to treat the talks as a forum to expose the "reactionary" and "aggressive" nature of America's imperialist policy in East Asia. Following Mao's instructions, Zhou called a series of meetings at the Foreign Ministry to consider new diplomatic alternatives. The participants concluded that Beijing "should adopt a policy line of positive offensive" toward the Americans at the forthcoming meetings.¹⁵¹



*Chinese-American ambassadorial talks at Warsaw, 15 September 1958.
Xinhua News Agency.*

"If the American side fails to respond to our proposal directly and continues to argue for an immediate cease-fire," reported Zhou in a letter to Mao on 17 September, "we should immediately present another proposal, demanding that the Americans withdraw all of their armed forces from Taiwan, Penghu, and the Taiwan Strait, stop all provocative military actions in China's territorial space and water, and cease interference in China's internal affairs, thus relaxing the tension existing in the Taiwan Strait."¹⁵²

Mao probably was not totally satisfied with Zhou's response because the next day, after having met with several other top party leaders, the premier presented a more comprehensive plan "for struggling against the United States":

In order to counter America's cease-fire request, we should expand our activities in all respects to demand that U.S. armed forces stop all provocations and withdraw from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait. Concrete measures are as follows: (1) Prepare a statement by the foreign minister to rebut Dulles's UN speech. (2) After the issuance of the statement, mobilize newspapers, various parties, and people's organizations all over the country to echo it. (3) Convey our strategies to Soviet chargé d'affaires and Liu Xiao

[Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union], letting them convey [our plans] to Khrushchev and Gromyko, so that the Soviet Union and other fraternal countries will cooperate with us.¹⁵³

Zhou's new plans delighted Mao. The chairman immediately wrote to the premier, praising these plans as "very good indeed" since they "will allow us to gain the initiative." The chairman also instructed Zhou to "take due action immediately"; in particular, he asked Zhou to convey these plans both to Wang Bingnan in Warsaw and to Ye Fei in Fujian, "making sure that they understand that the keys to our new policy and new tactics are to hold the initiative, to keep the offensive, and to remain reasonable." The chairman commented at the end of the letter: "Sweeping down irresistibly from a commanding height, and advancing like a knife cutting through a piece of bamboo—this is what our diplomatic struggle needs to be."¹⁵⁴ With the implementation of Mao's instructions, the possibility of ending the crisis through the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw virtually disappeared.¹⁵⁵

"Leaving Jinmen in Jiang's Hands"

In late September, when the crisis was entering its second month, the tension in the Taiwan Strait looked as bad as—if not worse than—it did at any point in the previous four weeks. On 22 September, when Wang and Beam met for the third time in Warsaw, the Chinese ambassador was primed for a counteroffensive. He called the proposal Beam presented on 18 September, which emphasized immediate cease-fire as the first step toward relaxing tension in the Taiwan Strait, "absurd and absolutely unacceptable." Abandoning his own offer from one week earlier, Wang presented a new three-point proposal, which established U.S. withdrawal of all its armed forces as the precondition to ease the tension in the Taiwan Strait area. The Swiss embassy was turned into a battlefield of sharp accusations and denunciations, with Wang and Beam rebutting every point the other side was making and charging the other side for causing the crisis in Taiwan and in East Asia.¹⁵⁶

At the same time that Wang was "taking the offensive" in Warsaw, Zhou Enlai was making every effort to mobilize international support. On 18 September, Zhou met with S. F. Antonov, Soviet chargé d'affaires in Beijing, to brief him on recent developments in the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou told him that after the first meeting of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, Beijing firmly believed that "the central issue is that the United States should withdraw all of its armed forces from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait area, and that only after the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces will the tension in

this area be eliminated." Zhou also told Antonov that if Washington continued to request an immediate cease-fire in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing would demand the withdrawal of all U.S. forces first. In the meantime, Beijing would "mobilize the entire Chinese media to demand that the U.S. armed forces withdraw from the Taiwan Strait area," and the PLA would "continue to concentrate on conducting punitive shelling of Jiang's troops on Jinmen and Mazu." Zhou asked Antonov to convey these points to the Soviet government as well as to the Soviet representative to the UN.¹⁵⁷ In the following days, Zhou met with Indian, Burmese, and Ceylonese ambassadors to China, as well as a governmental delegation from Cambodia, denouncing Washington's "cease-fire plot" at Warsaw and asking the representatives of these "friendly countries" to prevent Dulles from "playing with the same cease-fire plot" at the UN.¹⁵⁸ On 20 September, Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi issued a statement to rebut Dulles's speech of four days earlier, claiming that "the six hundred million Chinese people are determined to unite together to resist the U.S. aggressors and to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the great socialist motherland."¹⁵⁹

Despite the highly provocative language used in open propaganda, Beijing's leaders did not want to escalate the military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. What Mao desired from these "offensives" was to win back the "initiative" in a diplomatic confrontation with the United States rather than to trigger a military showdown. When commanders at the Fujian Frontal Headquarters received the instruction from Beijing to "win back the initiative," they immediately worked out a new plan to escalate military operations aimed at Jinmen so as to "coordinate with the diplomatic struggle in Warsaw." According to the plan, in addition to continuing artillery shelling, the PLA's air force would begin bombing Jinmen to "increase pressure on GMD troops there," and, then, ground shelling and air bombardment would be coordinated to pursue "bigger and more comprehensive results."¹⁶⁰ When the plan was submitted to Beijing for approval, Zhou found it inappropriate. In a letter to Mao dated 22 September, the premier pointed out:

Under the current situation, it is appropriate for the guidelines for operations in Jinmen to remain "shelling but not landing" and "cutting off [the enemy's supplies] but not letting [the enemy] die," so as to make the enemy panicky day and night without being able to take any rest. It is indeed not easy to coordinate a joint operation of the navy, air force, and ground artillery force, and there is the possibility that American ships and planes could be hit. It is even more inappropriate for our air force to bomb Jinmen, as

this will provide Jiang's air force with an excuse to bomb the mainland. At present, the U.S. is controlling Jiang's air force, not allowing it to bombard the mainland, and one main reason for this is that they are not certain how our air force will retaliate: by bombing Jinmen or Taiwan? Since the Americans are unable to predict the direction of our air force's operations, it is beneficial to us not to trigger Jiang's air force to bomb the mainland. If Jiang's air force bombs the mainland and we are only able to bomb Jinmen (but not Taiwan), we are showing our weaknesses.¹⁶¹

Mao approved Zhou's letter as soon as he read it. The chairman commented that the premier's opinions about operations in Jinmen were "all correct, as they will allow us to occupy an unbeatable position while at the same time completely holding the initiative."¹⁶² In accordance with Mao's and Zhou's instructions, the PLA shore batteries in Fujian continued sporadic daily shelling of the Jinmen islands, striking the GMD's supply convoys, while the PLA's air force and navy occasionally attacked the GMD's transport planes and ships in the Jinmen area (but always avoided the Americans).¹⁶³ Consequently, the actual combat intensity in the Jinmen area had reduced significantly by the end of September.

Within this context, Beijing's leaders again considered how to bring the crisis to an end. In a meeting with Soviet chargé d'affaires Antonov on 27 September, Zhou discussed three future scenarios for the Taiwan Strait crisis. The first scenario was that "when the conditions become mature, the United States will be ready to make concessions. . . . If the United States guarantees the withdrawal of Jiang's troops [from Jinmen], we may agree to hold fighting for a period to allow Jiang's troops to withdraw." The second and third scenarios were that "the current confrontation will continue as both sides will stick to their positions," or that "the United States will voluntarily put its neck into the noose" by directly involving itself in the military conflict. In Zhou's opinion, the second scenario was the most possible.¹⁶⁴

However, at the end of September, when signs indicated that Washington might be willing to end the crisis along the lines of the first scenario, Beijing's whole approach toward seizing Jinmen, a key goal of the shelling campaign, changed completely. On 30 September, Dulles made extensive comments on the Taiwan Strait crisis at a news conference. In response to a question concerning whether it would be feasible for the GMD troops to withdraw from the offshore islands, the secretary of state asserted, "[I]t all depends upon the circumstances under which they would be withdrawn. . . . If there were a cease-

fire in the area which seemed to be reasonably dependable, I think it would be foolish to keep these large forces on these islands."¹⁶⁵

Dulles's message immediately caught Beijing's attention. By that time, Mao had returned to Beijing from his inspection tour of southern China. On 3 and 4 October, the CCP Politburo Standing Committee met to discuss Beijing's overall strategy toward the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou reported to his colleagues that, in his opinion, Dulles intended to "use the current opportunity to create two Chinas." What Dulles wanted, according to the premier, was for Beijing to commit to a nonmilitary policy in dealing with the Taiwan issue, and Washington in turn would pressure Taiwan to give up the plan to "recover the mainland." In Zhou's view, Dulles's unspoken goal was to "trade Jinmen and Mazu for Taiwan and Penghu," thus formalizing the separation between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. Zhou particularly emphasized that this was exactly what the Americans had tried to do at the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, and that "the American negotiators spoke even more undisguisedly at the talks than had been suggested in Dulles's speech." Reacting to Zhou's introduction, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping pointed out that both China and the United States had been probing the other's real intentions, and, by now, both sides had gained some idea about the other side's bottom line. They also argued that both China and the United States had acted cautiously during the crisis to avoid a direct military confrontation. Now, in their views, "the shelling had mobilized the Chinese masses, had mobilized world opinion, had played the role of supporting the Arab people, and had created dramatic pressure on American rulers." In short, they believed that it was time to bring the crisis to an end.¹⁶⁶

At this point, Mao asked a crucial question: "How about leaving Jinmen and Mazu in Jiang Jieshi's hands?" The chairman, who obviously had carefully considered this issue, presented his reasoning: "The advantage [of doing so] is that since both islands are very close to the mainland, we may maintain contacts with the GMD through them. Whenever necessary, we may shell them. Whenever we are in need of tension, we may tighten this noose, and whenever we want to relax the tension, we may loosen the noose. We will let them hang there, neither dead nor alive, using them as a means to deal with the Americans." The chairman also argued that even if Jiang were allowed to continue to occupy Jinmen and Mazu, he could not "stop the socialist construction in the mainland"; nor would his troops at Jinmen and Mazu alone be capable of constituting a serious security threat to Fujian province. In comparison, argued the chairman, if Jiang lost Jinmen and Mazu or if his troops were forced

by the Americans to withdraw from them, "we will lose a card to deal with the Americans and Jiang, thus leading to the emergence of a de facto 'two Chinas' situation."

At Mao's urging, the politburo agreed to adopt this new policy of "leaving Jinmen in Jiang's hand," so that the offshore islands might be "turned into a burden for the Americans." Mao then pointed out that, to justify the new policy domestically and internationally, it was necessary to begin a huge propaganda campaign. Indeed, how to present Beijing's new strategy to end the crisis became an important issue for Mao. The chairman knew very well that if he failed to present his case powerfully, the very reasons for the entire shelling operation, as well as Beijing's initiation and management of the crisis, would be called into serious question. Mao proposed that Beijing's propaganda emphasize that the Taiwan issue was a matter of China's internal affairs, that the shelling of Jinmen was the continuation of the Chinese civil war and thus should not be meddled in by any foreign power or international organization, that the presence of American troops in Taiwan was a violation of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that after the Americans left, the Taiwan issue could be solved through direct negotiation between the CCP and the GMD. At the end of the meeting, Mao instructed the Chinese media, and *Renmin ribao* in particular, to "hold the fire" for a few days in order to "prepare and replenish munitions," and then "ten thousand cannons will boom with one order."¹⁶⁷

As soon as Mao had made up his mind, he moved to change his will into action. What he put together was an extraordinary drama, one that would combine in one act unexpected military maneuver, well-calculated diplomatic feints, and, most important of all, an unconventional propaganda effort. On 5 October, Mao wrote a letter to Peng Dehuai and Huang Kecheng in which he laid out his operational plans: "Our batteries should not fire a single shell on 6 and 7 October, even if there are American airplanes and ships escorting [the GMD]. If the enemy bombards us, our forces should not return fire. [We should] cease our activities, lie low, and wait and watch for two days. Then, we will know what to do." The chairman stressed to Peng and Huang not to "issue any public statement during these two days because we need to wait and see clearly how the situation will develop."¹⁶⁸

At the same time that Mao was shuffling military deployments, Zhou was busy with diplomatic activities. He first met with Indonesia's ambassador to China. The premier told him that he had learned that eight countries, with Indonesia as one of the main initiators, had been preparing to issue a statement concerning the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou advised the Indonesian am-

bassador that the statement should acknowledge that Taiwan was part of Chinese territory, that the crisis was the result of America's policy of aggression in the Taiwan area, and that Washington had no right to intervene in Jinmen and Mazu.¹⁶⁹ Zhou then met with the Soviet chargé d'affaires. After informing Antonov that Beijing had decided that "it is better to leave Jinmen and Mazu in Jiang's hands," the premier gave a detailed explanation about why Beijing had reached this decision. In particular, said the premier, the new policy would turn Jinmen and Mazu into a huge burden for Washington; "whenever we wanted tension, we will strike at them, and whenever we want relaxation, we will loosen [the noose] there." Thus the new policy would play the role of "educating the people of the world, and primarily the Chinese people," while deepening the already profound contradictions between Taipei and Washington. The premier asked that Moscow give the policy its full support.¹⁷⁰

Early on the morning of 6 October, Beijing stopped all regular radio broadcasts to deliver a "Message to the Compatriots in Taiwan" in the name of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai. Written in powerful and shrewd yet elegant language, this document actually was Mao's creation. The chairman originally did not plan to issue a statement because he wanted to observe how Taipei and Washington would respond to the PLA's holding of fire on Jinmen. But he quickly changed his mind and decided to draft a message himself.¹⁷¹ "We are all Chinese and reconciliation is the best course for us to take," the message asserted. The shelling of Jinmen was designed to punish the "rampant actions" of Taiwan's leaders and to highlight that "Taiwan was part of Chinese territory, not part of American territory" and that "there exists only one China, not two Chinas." "The U.S. imperialists are the common enemy for all of us," the message continued, and, beginning on 6 October, on the condition of "no American escorts," the PLA would suspend shelling on Jinmen for seven days so as to allow supplies to be "freely delivered" to the islands.¹⁷²

After seven days, on 13 October, Peng Dehuai announced that the shelling would be put on hold for another two weeks.¹⁷³ Yet Mao still wanted to show that Beijing was in full control of the situation. Therefore, taking Dulles's forthcoming official visit to Taiwan as an excuse, Mao ordered the PLA's shore batteries to conduct a one-hour barrage of Jinmen on 20 October. Mao instructed that the shelling should be announced in both Chinese and English in order to achieve the biggest propaganda effect.¹⁷⁴ On 25 October, Peng Dehuai issued "Another Message to the Compatriots in Taiwan" (again drafted by Mao), announcing that, from that day on, the PLA would shell the Jinmen islands only on odd days, leaving even days for GMD troops to receive supplies

and take rests.¹⁷⁵ After more than two months, the PLA stopped regular and intensive shelling on Jinmen, and the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958 finally came to an end.

Conclusion

Given the fact that the use of nuclear weapons had been widely considered and discussed during the course of the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958, the event must be regarded as one of the most dangerous international crises in Cold War history. Yet, from a conventional "threat reaction" perspective—even by taking into account the usually extraordinary sense of insecurity prevailing during the Cold War era—this crisis should not have occurred in the first place. Despite frequent military clashes between Taiwan and the mainland since 1949, neither the GMD nor the United States presented a serious and immediate threat to the PRC in 1958. Indeed, since the first Taiwan Strait crisis in 1954–55, the tension in the strait had been declining continuously, with Taipei dramatically reducing its hostile military activities aimed at the mainland (partly because it was bound by the 1954 U.S.-Taiwan treaty of mutual defense) and with Beijing offering peace overtures to the GMD. When the crisis erupted in the summer of 1958, Mao and his comrades saw little challenge from the United States and its allies (including the GMD regime in Taiwan) to the PRC's physical safety; and they did not believe that the United States was either willing or ready to involve itself in a major military confrontation with the PRC in East Asia.¹⁷⁶ Thus, narrowly defined "security concerns," which emphasize only "hard" and physical threats, cannot be the main reason that Beijing initiated the crisis.

As indicated in this study, Mao decided to bring China into the crisis primarily for the purpose of creating an extraordinary environment in which the full potential of the Great Leap Forward—a crucial episode in the development of Mao's grand enterprise of continuous revolution—would be thoroughly realized. No other world leader had ever used such straightforward and enthusiastic language as did Mao in 1958 to discuss the huge advantage involved in using international tension to initiate domestic mobilization. Mao certainly was obsessed by a tremendous sense of insecurity, but his fear in no way resembled any of the conventional "threat perceptions" that prevailed during the Cold War period; first and foremost, Mao's obsession was the product of his unique "postrevolution anxiety." What worried the chairman most was that if he failed to find new and effective means to enhance the inner dynamics of his continuous revolution, the revolution would lose its momentum and, as a result, would eventually wither. For Mao, this was a threat of

a fatal nature, and he was determined to do anything possible to prevent it from happening. In 1958, in the context of the emerging Great Leap, Mao's determination was easily transformed into his decision to initiate a crisis in the Taiwan Strait by ordering the PLA to shell the Jinmen islands. In a sense, the Great Leap was for Mao a great drama, one that was designed to mobilize and enhance the revolutionary enthusiasm of China's ordinary people. The shelling and the crisis played a role similar to the drumbeats in a Beijing opera—without them the drama would completely lose its rhythm, dramaticism, and theatricality, and thus would lose the very elements for which it is performed in the first place.

The special way in which Mao used international tension to promote domestic mobilization reflected the chairman's reading of a key factor shaping popular Chinese perceptions of China's relations with the outside world, that is, the Chinese people's profound victim mentality. Throughout modern times, the Chinese consistently believed that the political, economic, and military aggression by foreign imperialist countries had humiliated China and the Chinese people. As a result, a victim mentality—one that had been reinforced by China's age-old Central Kingdom concept—emerged to dominate the Chinese view of China's position in the world. Consequently, almost every time that China encountered an international crisis (no matter how the crisis began), the deep-rooted Chinese victim mentality would readily provide the Chinese leaders with a theme to encourage nationwide mobilization—provided that the leaders were able to present the Chinese as a victimized party or as endeavoring to resist China being continuously victimized in the international community. In the 1958 crisis, Mao consistently justified his shelling decision by emphasizing that Jinmen and Mazu, together with Taiwan and Penghu, were Chinese territories that had been "lost" during modern times as the result of imperialist aggression (first by the Japanese and then by the Americans) against a weak China. In doing so, Mao effectively appealed to the Chinese people's victim mentality, thus making the decision to shell Jinmen almost unchallengeable from a Chinese perspective.

Mao also used the crisis to challenge the postwar international order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. That Mao acted to put the United States on the defensive by constantly probing Washington's intentions and strategic bottom lines was evident in terms of both his rhetoric and diplomatic and military strategies. What should be emphasized is that underlying his behavior was also a profound desire to push the United States to recognize that his China was a qualified challenger to America's regional and global hegemony, thus making China a central actor in international politics. This

is why, despite the fact that China is so far away from the Middle East and had so few practical interests there, Mao still found it necessary for Beijing to respond to the American-British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan in dramatic ways.

Equally revealing is Mao's attitude toward Moscow before and during the crisis. Although the Soviet Union was China's most important ally in the 1950s, Mao intentionally kept the Soviet leaders in the dark about the timing, course, and purpose of his actions against Taiwan. Particularly troublesome was Mao's consistent expression of contempt for the danger involved in the possibility that the crisis might lead to a nuclear catastrophe. The chairman certainly did not believe that the crisis would lead to such a dire situation—indeed, it was exactly because he did not believe so that he ordered the shelling. However, he enjoyed repeatedly bringing the topic—in his highly dialectic and philosophical manner—to the attention of the Soviet leaders. What Mao wanted was to challenge the moral courage and ideological values of the Soviet leaders, thus making them appear morally inferior. Consequently revolutionary China's centrality in the international Communist movement and in the world—since communism represented the future of the human race—would naturally be established and recognized.

For China 1958 turned out to be a year of great disaster. Following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, it is estimated that between 20 and 30 million Chinese people died in a three-year-long nationwide famine. The effects of the Taiwan Strait crisis were for China no less serious. In the wake of the crisis, the conflict between China and the United States intensified, the distrust between Beijing and Moscow deepened continuously, and the hostility between the mainland and Taiwan, especially in a psychological sense, increased dramatically. However, from Mao's perspective, his initiation and management of the crisis remained a successful case of promoting domestic mobilization by provoking international tension. The experience set a decisive precedent in Mao's handling of China's domestic and external policies in the 1960s, especially when he was leading China toward another crucial episode in his continuous revolution—the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. That, as is well known today, was a path toward another great disaster.



CHAPTER 8 CHINA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE VIETNAM WAR, 1964–1969

The Vietnam War was an international conflict. Not only was the United States engaged in large-scale military operations in a land far away from its own, but the two major Communist powers, China and the Soviet Union, were also deeply involved. Scholars have long assumed that Beijing played an important role in supporting Hanoi's efforts to fight the United States. Because of the lack of access to Chinese source materials, however, it has been difficult for scholars to illustrate and define the motives, decision-making processes, magnitude, and consequences of China's involvement in the Vietnam War.

This chapter, as the continuation of the examination in Chapter 5 of China's connections with the First Indochina War, aims to shed some new light on China's involvement in the Vietnam War. It covers the five crucial years from 1964 to 1969, with emphasis on an analysis of the failure of an alliance that was once claimed to be "between brotherly comrades."

Background: Chinese–North Vietnamese Relations, 1954–1962

The 1954 Geneva agreement on Indochina concluded the First Indochina War but failed to end military conflicts in Southeast Asia. When it became clear that a peaceful reunification through the plebiscite scheduled for 1956 would be indefinitely blocked by Washington and the Ngo Dinh Diem government in Saigon, the Vietnamese Communist leadership decided in 1959–60 to resume "armed resistance" in the South.¹ Policymakers in Washington, perceiving that the battles in South Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia (especially in Laos) represented a crucial contest against further Communist expansion, continuously increased America's military involvement there.² Consequently, the Second Indochina War intensified.

Beijing was a main participant, as well as a beneficiary, of the Geneva agreement of 1954. China's policy toward the settlement of the First Indochina War reflected its strategic considerations at that time, which included a desire to