

## The Early Years of the PRC - The Korean War, relations with external powers US/USSR

### Korean War 1950-1953

Between 1910 and 1945 Korea was not split North/South and was occupied by Japan.

After the defeat of Japan in 1945, Korea was partitioned along the 38th parallel with South Korea protected by the US and the North by the USSR.



In 1950, the North Koreans crossed the parallel with the aim of imposing Communist control of the peninsula.

The **US assumed** this invasion was the brain child of the new Communist bloc of China (Mao) and the USSR (Stalin).

In **reality**, it seems conversations between Mao and Stalin had not discussed this. Indeed, the Chinese were occupied with internal reunification (Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan) and had been thinking of reducing military expenditure.

That said, **Stalin** was certainly involved. It is thought that:

- Kim Il Sung, the leader of North Korea, had convinced Stalin they could overwhelm South Korea spreading Communism.
- The US would be sucked in if this happened and would be unlikely to win as Kim had said the North Koreans were very capable.
- Should the North Koreans succeed, the US would be humiliated and the USSR, by doing very little, would win a 'communist' victory in Asia. Stalin saw great gain for no military commitment, simply political backing.
- Stalin also thought that they might be able to persuade China to get involved, which would distract China from challenging USSR's role as the leader of international communism and from causing trouble over disputed territories in China. It would also be a great PR coup for international communism.

- With this in mind, Stalin wrote to Mao in 1950 urging them to enter the war, as the USSR would.

On receipt of this letter, Mao was in a very difficult position.

- He had problems at home with reunification and was running low on some assets meaning a certain reliance on the USSR (see Xinjiang notes). Indeed he had to persuade the PLA to get involved.
- But as the North Koreans had already invaded, triggering concern from the US, this concern could only increase if the USSR became involved. So, Mao was faced with a potential conflict with the US through no fault of his own.

### **China's entry into the war**

When the US landed in South Korea in June 1950, under the UN flag (NB UN Security Council members included US, USSR and China!), Zhou Enlai (China's foreign minister) declared 'North Korea's defence is our defence' and demonstrations ensued.

In October 1950, US forces crossed the 38th parallel and China declared they were fully engaged in the war.

The war went on for 3 years and ended in a truce, largely due to US threatening to use its nuclear might. **The Panmunjong Truce** which simply agreed the division along the 38th parallel.

### **Consequences of the War for China**

#### **Negative**

- China lost 1 million soldiers in a war that they had effectively been forced to enter (by the USSR but also by their nervousness of US). This was 25% of the forces committed.
- US stood firm behind Taiwan and the GMD (a position that lasted until 1971) which meant Taiwan would not be taken back the China.
- It was costly economically. Industrial resources were diverted to help the war effort.
- It locked China into further reliance on USSR for resources, albeit short term.

#### **Positive**

- Mao had effectively stood up to the US on the international stage and had not been defeated.
- Mao and China had also fought for international communism enhancing its standing in that respect. This led to:
  - USSR links were strengthened (is this a negative too?) in the short term.
  - It 'fostered national pride' in China OR National unity was needed was the war was justification of political and social repression being used to create 'unity' in China

#### **Effect on Policy**

- The threat of US nuclear might influenced Mao's thinking on military power and spending on nuclear weaponry going forward.

- Difficult relations with the USSR and the US support for the GMD drove Mao's desire for China to stand alone in the world.

## **The PRC and The USSR**

Lynch believes that tension rather than harmony was the defining characteristic of the relationship between China and the USSR (Mao and Stalin) post 1949, despite ideological differences.

Their differences stemmed from 4 main factors:

Territorial disputes

Ideological differences

National rivalry

Mao and Stalin personality clash

### **Territorial disputes**

At the end of WW2, Manchuria was returned to China from Japan.

However, before its return, the USSR invaded Manchuria as the major offensive in the Soviet-Japan War 1945, which was part of the final throes of WW2. It had been agreed at Yalta in 1945 (and previously at Tehran) that the USSR would attack Japan and be a major force in the 'Asian theatre.

On Manchuria's eventual return to China, the USSR stripped the region of resources. Border disputes were a constant issue here.

NB - go back and re-read Civil War notes for differing views of the USSR in Manchuria in particular whether they helped or hindered the CCP victory. It is not entirely agreed.

### **Ideological differences**

Mao believed in Marxism with a nationalist focus whilst Stalin believed the USSR interpretation of Marxism was the only true one.

### **National Rivalry**

Mao believed that Stalin did not want a strong China, ie he was not driven by a desire for global communism more a desire to pursue a strong USSR under the guise of Communism.

An example might be that in 1945, the Soviet Union signs a Soviet-GMD friendship treaty. This allowed Soviet forces into Manchuria as long as the Soviet Union recognises the GMD as the only legitimate authority in China. USSR being pragmatic as the GMD were recognised internationally at this stage hence, is Communism really the aim?

However, Mao needed to rely on USSR for economic resources in the early years due to the decimated economy under the GMD/Civil war years.

### **Mao and Stalin**

They did not get on personally and Mao felt Stalin often treated him with disdain Eg Barbarossa; meeting to agree the Sino-Soviet treaty in 1950, Mao felt no official arrangements were made, thus showing disrespect

### **Sino Soviet Treaty 1950**

Mao negotiated this in order to guarantee economic and military help, although Stalin was not keen. It included a return of some remaining Manchurian territory, an agreement to support each other in conflict and \$300 million loan. In fact, it came at a heavy price and many, including Krushchev after Stalin, commented it was almost an exploitative treaty in the manner of the colonialist treaties of the 1800s.

Eg

10,000 Soviet economic and military advisors who went to China were paid for in full by China; China handed over most of its bullion to the USSR  
\$300 million loan had to be repaid including interest, it was not a 'friendly' agreement.

### **Korean War**

USSR manipulated China into being involved at a point when the Chinese were just trying to forge the PRC.

### **Why continue in this relationship?**

Mao had no experience of building an economy/industrialisation so felt he should copy the USSR model. He did not want to copy the capitalist West, not that he had any allies within. (he said as much in a speech in 1962). Although in 1958, he decided to become more independent with his policies.

### **The PRC and the US**

US had supported GMD in the civil war, despite concern of Jiang's leadership skills (following on from the WW2 campaigns;

US protected Taiwan (and Jiang)

US did not officially recognise the PRC

CIA agents in Tibet, trying to aid them against PRC 'liberation'

Korea war seen as Communist/Capitalist

Mao, as a believer in the Marxist dialectic, believed a final battle between capitalism and marxism would ensue, hence his distrust of US.