

## **Beijing and the Paper Tiger: The Impact of the Korean War on Sino-American Relations**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mutual hostility and confrontation characterized the first two decades of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. This article examines the impact of the Korean War on creating and perpetuating this mutual enmity. The first half describes how the U.S. reaction to the outbreak of the Korean War and especially Chinese military intervention in the conflict removed any chance for an early reconciliation, discussing Washington's specific policies from June 1950 until the armistice in July 1953 aimed at achieving diplomatic isolation and economic punishment of China's new regime. The second half defines China's five primary postwar foreign policy goals and explains how Beijing faced strident opposition from the United States in its attempts to achieve each objective. While Washington's efforts largely failed, U.S. actions ensured that Sino-American relations would remain poisoned for fifteen more years.

**Keywords:** Korean War; Neutralization of Taiwan; Chinese military intervention; United Nations; Mao Zedong; Harry S. Truman; Korean Armistice Negotiations; Korean Demilitarized Zone; voluntary repatriation; Dwight Eisenhower; U.S.-Republic of China Mutual Security Pact; Geneva Conference; Taiwan Strait Crisis; Bandung Conference; Geneva Ambassadorial Talks.

## **Introduction: The Origins of Mistrust**

On January 5, 1950, President Harry S Truman declared publicly that the United States “will not pursue a course which will lead to involvement in the civil war in China.” Moreover, it would not “provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa.”<sup>1</sup> His statement came just a few weeks after Communist forces had compelled the remnants of Guomindang armies to evacuate China’s mainland and seek refuge for Jiang Jieshi’s government on Taiwan. American officials of course were very distressed when Mao Zedong had proclaimed establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, but Truman and his advisors had decided to accept this outcome because they saw no easy way to reverse it. China scholar Qing Simei recently has written that Truman’s announcement signaled his adoption of a new grand strategy that “included two parts: First, the [United States would create] a limited economic relationship with Beijing, to drive a wedge between China and the Soviet Union, to break up the Sino-Soviet alliance. Second, [it] would not intervene in Beijing’s [seizure of] Taiwan campaign, which U.S. intelligence reports indicated would happen in the summer of 1950.”<sup>2</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson, speaking at the National Press Club seven days later, repeated the elements of this new policy when he not only placed Taiwan beyond the U.S. “defensive perimeter” in the Pacific, but also blamed Jiang’s defeat on his failure to meet the economic needs of China’s people.<sup>3</sup> Then, in March, Acheson informed UN General Secretary Trygve Lie that the United States would not use its veto to block a majority decision to seat the PRC in the international organization.<sup>4</sup>

Less than six months later, North Korea launched a massive offensive across the 38th parallel to reunite its country, igniting the Korean War. Among the most significant legacies of this conflict was its initiation of a sequence of events that would poison Sino-American relations for two decades. Many historians have blamed the Korean War for a missed opportunity for Washington to establish normal relations with Beijing. Chen Jian, however, has made a powerful case that anti-colonial and Communist ideology ensured that Mao and his associates would spurn U.S. offers of friendship and align with the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, on February 14, 1950, Mao, after weeks of contentious discussions with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in Moscow, signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. In response, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) began to reconsider its position regarding Taiwan, lobbying Truman and Acheson to adopt a policy of defending Taiwan and providing military and economic aid to Jiang’s Republic of China (ROC). Dean Rusk, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern

Affairs, and other State Department officials began advocating privately replacement of Jiang with a more competent leader. Finally, U.S. Occupation Commander General Douglas gave Defense Secretary Louis Johnson during his visit to Tokyo in June 1950 a memorandum urging transformation of Taiwan into a U.S. bastion to block further Communist expansion in East Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Unaware of the policy shift underway in Washington, Mao already had reason to distrust the United States because Truman's earlier efforts to end the civil war had not been even-handed. In late 1945, the president, as is well-known, had sent U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall to mediate a settlement, but neither he nor Truman were willing to act on threats to halt support for Jiang to force him to compromise—and the Guomintang leader knew this.<sup>7</sup> It therefore was highly unlikely that Washington and Beijing would have been able to develop the mutual trust necessary for an early cordial relationship. It was the Korean War, however, that would transform this suspicious and adversarial association between the United States and the PRC into a hostile and perilous confrontation. Neither nation wanted this outcome, especially the PRC. China had suffered enormous human and economic losses during its civil war, placing a priority on devoting its resources to economic recovery. Soviet documents reveal that Mao was even more reluctant than Stalin to approve Kim Il Sung's invasion plan but did so because he felt a deep debt to North Korea for providing troops that had helped defeat the Guomintang.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, Truman implemented provocative policies during and after the Korean War that challenged the PRC's vital interests. Rather than being intimidated, Beijing, as this article will show, emerged from Korea determined to expose the United States as a "paper tiger."

Truman set the tone for rancor and hostility in future Sino-American relations on June 27, 1950 when he ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to protect the island of Taiwan against an invasion from the PRC and supposedly prevent Guomintang attacks against the mainland. Determination of Taiwan's future status, he said, would have to await restoration of peace in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or a resolution in the United Nations. Coming two days after the Korean War started, this "neutralization" of Taiwan in essence permanently created two Chinas. His action enraged Beijing, which saw the Guomintang government on Taiwan as illegitimate and the last remaining obstacle to China's reunification. Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai branded it "an armed invasion of the Chinese territory and a complete infringement on the U.N. Charter."<sup>9</sup> Escalating the acrimony, MacArthur, after appointment as head of the United Nations Command (UNC) in Korea,

visited Taiwan in late July to survey its needs for U.S. military assistance. He followed this with an unauthorized dispatch of a message to the annual meeting of the American Veterans of Foreign Wars calling publicly for action to make Taiwan a powerful U.S. military base in the Pacific. These actions conflicted with Truman's desire to limit the U.S. commitment to Taiwan. Nevertheless, Beijing, knowing MacArthur's hatred of communism and the PRC, rightly judged U.S. behavior during the early weeks of the Korean War as very threatening.<sup>10</sup>

Truman's "neutralization" of Taiwan came easily because U.S. leaders favoring a tougher stand against the Soviets in East Asia had laid the groundwork for the decision. Significantly, in April 1950, submission of National Security Council (NSC) Paper 68, calling for a huge increase in defense spending, signaled an emerging consensus in the U.S. government on the necessity to rely on military means to contain Communist expansion. Exaggerating the significance of North Korea's attack, the Truman administration placed a premium on worldwide military and strategic considerations, thus adding force to the argument for action to demonstrate U.S. resolve.<sup>11</sup> Of course, doing otherwise would have left Truman and Acheson subject to virulent partisan attacks from Republicans and Jiang's adherents in Congress. Though entirely logical from an American perspective, U.S. "neutralization" of Taiwan probably surprised Beijing. By contrast, Chinese leaders anticipated Truman's decision to commit combat forces to prevent Communist conquest of South Korea. As North Korean forces advanced, Mao began to warn Kim Il Sung about the probability of a U.S. amphibious military landing behind his armies on Korea's northwest coast at Inchon.<sup>12</sup> Shen Zihua explains in a recent article that Beijing in fact had offered to intervene shortly after the war began, but Stalin balked because he feared that this "would expand China's status and influence in Korea." The war definitely strained a relationship between the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea that already was complex, fractious, and mistrustful.<sup>13</sup>

Truman's decision to send U.S. forces across the 38th parallel weeks before the successful Inchon landing on September 15 was momentous. Profoundly misunderstanding the nature and power of nationalism as a force in world affairs, the president thought that the liberation of North Korea would initiate a process leading to the collapse of the Soviet empire. Instead, his reckless choice provoked Chinese intervention, extending the war from a conflict lasting three months to more than three years.<sup>14</sup> Almost as important, Truman's decision also dramatically altered the Sino-American relationship from one that might have remained rancorous coexistence to virulent and unrelenting confrontation. China scholars continue to debate the details surrounding

Mao's ultimate decision to commit Chinese troops in Korea. Shen emphasizes, however, that Stalin did not request PRC intervention until after South Korean forces entered the north, but then revoked a promise to provide Soviet air support. Mao did not make a final decision, Qing contends, until U.S. troops crossed the 38th parallel. At that moment, she concludes, China's leader chose "to enter the war" because Beijing had reached "the delicate balance between the defense of China's national independence and revolutionary internationalism."<sup>15</sup> Truman, of course, was oblivious to this disharmony, confident that Stalin controlled a monolithic Communist movement.

### **An Avoidable War**

War between the United States and China in Korea was avoidable. Zhou Enlai famously conveyed warnings to the U.S. government against entering North Korea, but American leaders thought the threat was a bluff. Their dismissive and patronizing attitude toward the Chinese had a long history. That the Truman administration did nothing in response to MacArthur's violation of orders as head of the United Nations Command (UNC) when he initiated his brash "Home By Christmas Offensive" provided evidence that ethnocentric hubris afflicted not just the general.<sup>16</sup> China's counteroffensive that shattered the UNC's push to the Yalu late in November 1950 had a dramatic impact on U.S. security policy. After Truman declared a state of national emergency, Congress approved expanding the defense budget from \$13.5 billion in 1950 to \$60.4 billion for fiscal 1952. Thereafter, the U.S. government's mobilization strategy until the Cold War ended was perpetual military preparedness, enormous military expenditures, and budget deficits.<sup>17</sup> But in the short run, U.S. officials identified the PRC as a villain that the United States had to punish and weaken, if not defeat and subdue. Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway provided the opportunity to achieve this goal first on the Korean battlefield. Restoring the fighting spirit of UNC forces following a costly and disorganized retreat, he staged offensives such as Operations Ripper and Killer that by March 1951 reestablished the front mostly above the 38th parallel.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States had moved vigorously to accomplish diplomatic isolation of Beijing. Washington had not recognized the PRC, a decision that the Korean War etched in stone for two decades. However, several other nations, most notably Britain, had established normal relations with the new Chinese government. The Soviet Union, for its part, had begun a boycott at the United Nations in January 1950 to protest the refusal to grant China's seat on the Security Council to the PRC in place of the ROC. Moscow's absence in June made it possible to

pass resolutions calling for defense of South Korea.<sup>19</sup> During early November 1950, the United Nations, in response to MacArthur's report of China's intervention, invited Beijing to participate in discussions about this allegation. Beijing sent Wu Xuiquan, who arrived at Lake Success on November 24, the same day MacArthur staged his offensive to the Yalu. His insistence that the United Nations seat the PRC as a member and act against U.S. aggression on Taiwan made clear the priority Beijing placed on acknowledging China's sovereignty as a condition for discussions. Unimpressed with Wu's analogy to China occupying Mexico or Hawaii, the United States was adamant in blocking consideration of either demand. Instead, it pressed for the passage of a UN resolution condemning the PRC for aggression in Korea. Disingenuously, Washington agreed to support a final compromise as a basis for discussions, knowing that the Chinese would reject it. Beijing obliged. On February 1, 1951, the United Nations approved a resolution branding China as an aggressor in the Korean War in a hypocritical act of intemperate spiteful revenge.<sup>20</sup>

For Washington, international condemnation of the PRC was just a first step in punishing the Beijing regime. The UN resolution also established the UN Additional Measures Committee (AMC) to "as a matter of urgency" consider further steps "to meet this aggression and to report thereon to the General Assembly." The AMC members were Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Egypt, France, Mexico, the Philippines, Turkey, the United States, and Venezuela. The United States already had frozen China's financial assets, imposed a total trade embargo, forbade U.S. ships from calling at PRC ports, and barred visas for Americans to travel to China. Now it urged international economic and political sanctions, recommending five measures against the PRC, among them non-recognition, its exclusion from all UN bodies, and an embargo on export to it of strategic goods. Even though Beijing rebuffed UN overtures for a negotiated settlement, Britain refused to approve political sanctions, but it did agree to serve on a subcommittee that drafted a proposal for economic sanctions. Then in April and May 1951, the Chinese launched two massive offensives to force the UNC out of Korea, but without success. In response, the AMC recommended on May 14 the adoption of a U.S. proposal for a selective embargo against China that the UN General Assembly approved. Less comprehensive than what the Truman administration preferred, it called upon UN members not to export to the PRC or North Korea "arms, ammunition and implements of war, atomic energy, materials, petroleum, transportation materials of strategic importance, and items useful in the production of arms, ammunition and implements of war."<sup>21</sup> This only

made China even more dependent on the Soviet Union.

### **The Long Road to a Truce**

China's failed spring offensives of 1951 severely weakened its ground forces, as well as exposing its inadequacies in firepower, mobility, and logistics. At the same time, the UNC had displayed a significant military superiority in using airborne infantry, air support, and tanks that, Colin Jackson argues, "surprised the Chinese and led to panic in some units."<sup>22</sup> Beijing now decided, as the Truman administration already had in March, that it could not achieve complete victory and should pursue a negotiated settlement. When the UNC suggested the possibility of truce talks on June 30, China had reason to be suspicious, having recently become the target of moral condemnation and economic reprisals. Truman's firing of MacArthur in April, however, did provide some reassurance of a sincere U.S. desire for peace. As a result, Korean War truce talks began at Kaesong on July 10, 1951, but lasted for two years. Historians have devoted much attention to describing the acrimonious atmosphere that the Communists established at the first negotiating sessions after occupying the area around Kaesong, highlighting their obsession with scoring propaganda points as evidence of their bad faith. These actions included greeting with photographers the UNC delegation's arrival in vehicles displaying white flags, giving the UNC chief delegate a smaller chair than his counterpart, competing to see who displayed the biggest flag, and refusing to allow UNC newsmen at Kaesong.<sup>23</sup> Communist critics also allege that they haggled needlessly over the agenda. But in fact, the two sides formally adopted a bilateral draft of a five-item agenda after meeting on just ten days for a total of 22 hours of discussion.<sup>24</sup>

Setting aside the issue of prisoner of war (POW) repatriation, the negotiators might have achieved an armistice agreement in four months had the United States not chosen to advance a preposterous proposal to resolve agenda item two calling for establishing "a military demarcation line" and "demilitarized zone [DMZ] as a basic condition for a cessation of hostilities." On July 26, after adoption of the agenda, General Nam Il, the Communist chief delegate, asked the UNC to present its position, but Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, his counterpart, refused to do so until the next day. Eager to reach quick agreement, the Communist side called for a line at the 38th parallel. But the following day, Joy proposed a demarcation line well north of the current fighting, requiring the enemy to agree to a hefty territorial retreat. Defining military activities as separated into zones of ground, air, and sea operations, he claimed that the Communists would forfeit only the first in an armistice, while the

UNC would sacrifice all three, requiring territorial compensation. Joy then haughtily avowed that this justified a demarcation line at the narrow neck of Korea, but proposed instead a 40-mile wide demilitarized zone (DMZ) with its northern border about 20 miles south of Wonsan in the east and roughly 75 miles south of the capital at Pyongyang in the west. Nam Il reacted with understandable anger at this affront, denouncing Joy's suggestion of "a line running through Pyongyang and Wonsan" as an act of intimidation, declaring that the UNC's specific "lines drawn at random were not worthy of attention [because] . . . the arguments you raised in support of these lines . . . were naïve and illogical."<sup>25</sup>

Joy's opening proposal had made it impossible for the Communists even to consider its honest proposal of the battlefront as a demarcation line because this would imply acceptance of military inferiority. Moreover, numerous U.S. officials had named the 38th parallel publicly as a suitable armistice line as recently as June during the U.S. Senate hearings into MacArthur's firing, rightly causing the Communists to see themselves as victims of a classic bait and switch. Accusing the UNC of arrogance, the Communist delegation adopted an inflexible stand insisting on the 38th parallel as the armistice line. On August 10, the UNC said it was willing to discuss a DMZ based on the existing line of ground contact, but Nam Il refused. There followed a "period of silence, lasting two hours and eleven minutes."<sup>26</sup> Beijing, however, still wanted an early truce agreement. Indeed, on August 20, Nam Il presented a qualification of his position on location of the DMZ, retreating from his demand for a demarcation line at the 38th parallel. Two days later, he pressed for an agreement in principle that "adjustments could be made to the line of contact by withdrawals and advances by both sides in such a way as to fix a military demarcation line."<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, China had immediate misgivings over its decision to compromise, fearing that it had shown weakness. Beijing decided to halt the talks unilaterally at the meeting on 23 August, charging that an alleged UNC air attack near Kaesong based on fabricated evidence meant the conference site was not safe. The swift progress in the talks suddenly troubled the Chinese, who decided to reassess their strategy. Armistice negotiations would remain suspended for more than six weeks because Ridgway, now UNC commander, insisted on moving the conference site.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the UNC had intensified its ground and air attacks against the enemy, which almost certainly helped to persuade the Communists to return to the bargaining table.<sup>29</sup> On October 7, they suggested resuming the talks, as well as yielding to the UNC demand to move the meeting place to Panmunjom, a village about six miles east of Kaesong. After approving a more comprehensive security agreement,

the Communists on October 25 formally abandoned the 38th parallel, but proposed a demarcation line that required the UNC to surrender most of its holdings above that line. Naturally, the UNC delegation flatly rejected this proposal.<sup>30</sup> But the Truman administration wanted to avoid charges that it was slowing progress toward peace because it feared that this would imperil continued support among its allies at the United Nations and also for ratification of the recently negotiated Japanese Peace Treaty. On November 13, the UNC received instructions to settle the issue based on the line of contact, suggesting that it be effective for one month. On November 17, the UNC tabled this proposal, but the Communist delegation insisted that the line's location, once decided, not be subject to revision, even after the specified period ended. The UNC again sought compromise, proposing that in the absence of an armistice within thirty days that the line should be subject to revision based on subsequent combat.<sup>31</sup>

Reflecting a new spirit of compromise, the Communists accepted and the two sides promptly agreed on the location of a specific line. On November 27, resolution of agenda item two provided that this provisional demarcation line would be the final one if the belligerents signed the armistice in thirty days. Neither side reopened the issue after the grace period ended, resulting in the provisional line becoming the de facto demarcation line and the basis for the DMZ at the last stage of the fighting.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the negotiators turned attention to resolving agenda item three, calling for "arrangements for the realization of a ceasefire and an armistice in Korea including composition, authority, and functions of a supervising organization." During December, productive bargaining led to agreement on the details for supervision of the ceasefire, but then deadlock occurred over the questions of airfield rehabilitation and the Communist desire for the Soviet Union to serve on the neutral supervisory commission. Early in 1952, discussions on agenda item five began and experienced immediate progress. On February 6, the Communists proposed a political conference after the armistice to discuss withdrawal of foreign forces from Korea, recommendations for peaceful settlement of the Korean question, and other problems relating to peace in Korea. The UNC delegation agreed to these provisions, with a few minor changes, after less than two weeks of discussion.<sup>33</sup>

Seven months after the Korean truce talks began negotiators might have signed a truce agreement had they not reached a stalemate regarding agenda item four, "arrangements relating to prisoners of war." This deadlock was the result of Truman's decision, for political reasons, to guarantee asylum for any Communist prisoner of war who did not

wish to return to the PRC or North Korea. When the UNC negotiators first introduced the concept of voluntary repatriation at the truce talks on January 2, 1952, the Communist delegation rejected it out of hand. But when the UNC speculated later that as many as 116,000 out of 132,000 Communist POWs and 38,500 civilian internees probably would elect to return home, allowing the impression that voluntary repatriation would not discredit Communist ideology, the Chinese agreed on April 2 to screening of POWs to separate potential repatriates from non-repatriates. After completing this process, the UNC delegation informed the Communist side that of 170,000 prisoners, only 70,000 wished to return home. This news infuriated the Communists, who must have thought that the UNC had swindled them with a bait and switch over the DMZ. Charging the UNC with deception, the Communist delegation assumed an inflexible position, demanding repatriation of all POWs as the Geneva Convention required. In a wild stab at settling all remaining disputes, the UNC delegation on April 28 submitted a package proposal. Dropping its demand for a ban on airfield rehabilitation, it called on the Communists to concede on Soviet participation on the supervisory team and voluntary repatriation—a trade of one for two. On May 2 the Communists accepted a swap on the first two provisions, but would not budge in demanding return of all POWs.<sup>34</sup>

Thereafter, only the impasse over the POW question prevented an armistice. Again, the UNC resorted to military escalation to place pressure on their opponents to compromise. With intensification of the war and no progress at Panmunjom, prisoner repatriation became an issue at the United Nations, with several states putting forth proposals. India's plan gained the most support, providing for a neutral commission to resolve the POW question. The United States preferred passing a resolution endorsing the proposal that the UNC delegation had presented to the Communists on October 8 as its final offer. Communist rejection had prompted the chief UNC delegate to adjourn the negotiations permanently. This deflating turn of events motivated the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution on December 3 advocating implementation of the Indian formula to end the impasse over POW repatriation. Washington wanted to force the PRC to back down, but approved this measure to avoid alienating its allies.<sup>35</sup> This was because the Truman administration, Charles Young perceptively writes, had embraced voluntary repatriation as a substitute for victory in compelling the Communists to submit to a U.S. grant of asylum for its soldiers. Knowing the American people would not accept this reason, U.S. officials blamed the lack of an armistice instead on the “wicked ways the Communists prevented peace” through “a bewildering snarl of petty

bickering, inscrutable ‘Oriental’ stubbornness, and senseless desire to keep killing.”<sup>36</sup> Only Truman’s decision to pursue forcible reunification was more important than insistence on voluntary repatriation in guaranteeing two decades of Sino-American enmity.

### **Explaining the War’s End and Sino-American Enmity**

How the Korean War ended remains contested terrain. Historians acknowledge that Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed the presidency in January 1953 thinking seriously about using expanded conventional bombing and the threat of nuclear attack to force concessions from the Communist side. The truce agreement came on July 27, after an accelerated bombing campaign in North Korea and bellicose rhetoric about expanding the war. Most scholars, however, reject Eisenhower’s claim that Beijing was reacting to his threat of an expanded war employing atomic weapons because no documentary evidence has surfaced to support his assertion. Instead, it was Stalin’s death on March 5 that was decisive because it brought to power leaders who wanted to end the war. Soviet documents reveal that Stalin had opposed an early armistice, using pledges of economic aid for recovery to compel the Chinese to continue fighting. Ironically, his death created a sense of political vulnerability that helped persuade Beijing to have Zhou Enlai signal a willingness to retreat on repatriation late in March before Secretary of State John Foster Dulles conveyed his vague atomic threat to India’s prime minister for delivery to Beijing. Furthermore, the indirect nuclear saber rattling of May 1953 was not much different from the implied threats that the Truman administration made in the fall of 1951, when B-29 bombers carried out atomic bombing test runs over North Korea.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Mao’s famous statement that the atomic bomb was a “paper tiger” makes U.S. success in intimidating the Chinese all the more unlikely.<sup>38</sup>

By January 1953, both sides in fact wanted an armistice. Washington and Beijing had grown tired of the economic burdens, military losses, political and military constraints, worries about an expanded war, and pressure from allies and the world community to end the stalemated war. Food shortages in North Korea coupled with an understanding that forcible reunification was no longer possible had motivated Pyongyang to favor an armistice even earlier. Moscow’s new leaders had been concerned even before Stalin died about economic problems in Eastern Europe. A more conciliatory approach in the Cold War, they believed, not only would reduce the risk of general war, but also might create tensions in the Western alliance if the United States acted provocatively in Korea. Weeks before Eisenhower’s threats of

using atomic weapons and the bombing of North Korea's dams and irrigation system in May, Chinese negotiators signaled a change in policy when they accepted the UNC's proposal for an exchange of sick and wounded POWs and then recommended turning non-repatriates over to a neutral state. Also, in late May and early June 1953, Chinese forces launched powerful attacks against positions that South Korean units were defending along the front line and pushed U.S. forces off Pork Chop Hill in July.<sup>39</sup> Far from being intimidated, Beijing thus showed its continuing resolve, persuading the United States to compromise on the final terms of the armistice. But there was no peace treaty in Korea, a warning sign that the wider battle between Washington and Beijing had just begun.

Chinese and Americans stopped trying to kill each other in Korea in the summer of 1953, but the war had built unremitting hostility into the Sino-American confrontation, which would fuel its continuation until the early 1970s. This clash might have subsided more quickly had the United States not assumed a posture of irrevocable refusal to accept the legitimacy of Beijing's postwar foreign policy objectives and its right to pursue them in the global arena. Instead, as Michael Yahuda writes, the United States became "the major obstacle to the attainment of [PRC] long-term foreign policy goals."<sup>40</sup> Beijing's actions during the five years after the Korean truce reflected pursuit of five primary aims. First, the PRC acted to defend its national security, as do all nation states. Second, China's leaders were determined to reestablish China's position as the preeminent nation in East Asia. Third, Beijing sought reunification of China through acquisition of Taiwan. Fourth, Mao and his associates wanted to elevate the international status of China as a recognized and respected world power. Finally, China's new leaders were determined to force the United States to treat it as a sovereign and equal nation. A major legacy of the Korean War was that it motivated the United States in the 1950s to oppose every effort of the PRC to achieve these objectives.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, Beijing would spurn U.S. hints in the 1960s about normalizing relations. As late as 1971, China expert A. Doak Barnett even speculated that if "Washington were simply to announce that it had decided to recognize the [PRC] in a de jure sense, . . . the Chinese Communists would almost certainly either ignore or reject the American actions."<sup>42</sup>

In 1953, Beijing accepted voluntary repatriation to end the Korean War as part of a new effort aimed at building "a peaceful united front." Seeking to avoid conflict, this policy relied on diplomacy to promote regional peace conducive to successful implementation of the PRC's first Five-Year Plan for internal economic development.<sup>43</sup> The Truman administration, however, saw only malevolent intent, as it continued to

create an alliance system to contain the perceived threat of Chinese expansion in East Asia. Significantly, the Korean War ended division in Washington regarding Japan's future, as the Pentagon agreed to early restoration of sovereignty and the State Department reciprocated with agreement to future Japanese rearmament. In September 1951, the Japanese Peace Treaty provided for independence the following May, but only after Tokyo had promised neither to recognize nor trade with the PRC. Simultaneously, Japan signed separately a bilateral security pact with the United States allowing U.S. troops to remain in Japan indefinitely. To assuage fears of a revived Japan, Washington achieved its parallel objective of containing the PRC when it negotiated security agreements with several nations in East Asia. In August 1951, it signed a mutual defense pact with the Philippines pledging mutual protection from aggression. The next month, the United States signed a similar agreement with Australia and New Zealand known as the ANZUS Treaty. In August 1953, Dulles negotiated the U.S.-South Korea Mutual Security Treaty. Beijing could anticipate that a defense pact with Jiang's regime was next after Eisenhower, in his State of the Union address the previous February, removed the Seventh Fleet from the Taiwan Strait, stating that the United States no longer would shield the mainland.<sup>44</sup>

Washington understood that the Korean War had established the power and prestige of the PRC in world affairs, weakening its strategic position in Asia and widening divisions with its allies. Along with negotiating new defense pacts, U.S. leaders intensified the economic warfare begun during the war. In September 1952, ten months before the armistice, the United States joined with Britain, France, Canada, and Japan in forming the China Committee (CHINCOM), a working group to maintain strict export controls against the PRC and other Communist states in Asia. The CHINCOM's creation was the result of differences between Washington on one side and London, Paris, and Ottawa on the other concerning an appropriate export control committee for Asia. The United States sought to establish a separate Far Eastern Group in Asia to impose stiffer export controls on the PRC and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) than what the Coordinating Committee on East-West Trade Policy (COCOM) then was maintaining towards the European Soviet bloc. But Britain, France, and Canada opposed the U.S. proposal because none saw any benefit in losing Asian trade. The compromise was creation of a separate Far Eastern Committee within the COCOM structure, which allowed U.S. officials to enforce more restrictive trade lists on exports to Asian Communist countries than the European Soviet bloc. Additionally, the United States pressured Japan into signing a bilateral agreement that required it to embargo 400 more

goods against the PRC than other CHINCOM members.<sup>45</sup>

For Beijing, persistence of the U.S. policy of military and economic containment of the PRC after the Korean armistice not only threatened its national security, but also its aspirations to reestablish China's place as the foremost nation in East Asia. World War II had shattered old forms of political and economic organization throughout the region. Mao and his associates had a powerful sense of mission to assert leadership in guiding the course of change in neighboring states.<sup>46</sup> John K. Fairbank emphasized long ago that, whether consciously or not, China's leaders were heirs of an imperial past. Mao, in particular, was sensitive to the historic place China held as the "middle kingdom" in East Asia providing a political and cultural model for its neighbors.<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Schwartz has cautioned against exaggerating the impact of China's imperial legacy in the making of early PRC foreign policy. Certainly another major motive force was Communist ideology.<sup>48</sup> The PRC was committed to promoting Marxism-Leninism as a blueprint for national development and encouraging emulation of the Chinese revolution. But this reinforced Beijing's greater desire to recreate a political and economic sphere of influence in areas adjacent to China. Of course, the PRC's determination to purge the U.S. presence in the region had deep historical roots. As Fairbank writes, understanding Beijing's actions requires first remembering that "the West had invaded China, not China the West." Beijing would not tolerate a resumption of the "gunboat diplomacy" that had inflicted humiliation and suffering on the Chinese people.<sup>49</sup>

### **Sino-U.S. Competition in East Asia**

China had sustained enormous damage in World War II and its civil war, but its strength still was very substantial relative to the power of neighboring Asian countries. Taking advantage of its central geographic location, large economy, and military prowess, Beijing acted quickly to reestablish regional hegemony. Pyongyang's failed invasion, Shen Zhihua points out, gave the PRC the chance to become "the main force" in Korea after intervention. Moreover, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) occupied Tibet during the Korean War.<sup>50</sup> Earlier in 1950, Beijing had recognized Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), declaring its intention to help its new Communist ally end French colonialism. China had even more incentive to provide assistance after U.S. intervention in the Korean War. During July, a Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAG) began providing aid to Viet Minh headquarters and opened an officer candidate school in southern China. The PRC's support for the Viet Minh grew steadily, not least because the

Truman administration was supplying France with economic and military aid to maintain its control over Indochina. By 1954, Washington was financing eighty percent of the French war effort. China strived to match this support, sending large amounts of U.S.-made heavy mortars, machine guns, recoilless rifles, and howitzers captured from defeated Guomindang forces. PLA troops provided logistical support and ran a special artillery school for Viet Minh soldiers. In addition to other training camps, the PRC maintained three hospitals in China to treat wounded Viet Minh fighters. "Chinese advisors," John Garver reports, "played a key role in formulating Viet Minh strategy and in directing Viet Minh forces in the execution of that strategy."<sup>51</sup>

Chinese assistance allowed Ho's forces to assume the offensive and, as is well known, lay siege to the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu early in 1954. In February, the Allied foreign ministers, during their meeting in Berlin, decided to hold a conference in Geneva to seek both a resolution of the Indochina crisis and a settlement in Korea. The Korean armistice had called for a political conference to convene three months after the agreement became effective to achieve withdrawal of all foreign troops and Korea's reunification. There was a meeting at Panmunjom in October 1953, but it adjourned after much bickering and total disagreement in December.<sup>52</sup> A final attempt to resolve the Korean dispute came at the Geneva Conference, which convened on April 26, 1954. All members of the United Nations that sent troops to fight in the Korean War, except South Africa, participated in discussions on Korea, plus the ROK, the DPRK, the PRC, and the Soviet Union. Washington endorsed a South Korean proposal assigning authority to the United Nations to supervise elections to establish a united, independent, and democratic Korea, with the UN forces remaining in Korea until it had accomplished this mission. The Communists understandably dismissed as absurd the notion of UN neutrality. The Soviet Union presented a counterproposal requiring as a prerequisite for any settlement first the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korean peninsula. Discussions ended in deadlock. On June 15, the sixteen nations contributing forces to the UNC issued a declaration clearly targeted at the PRC, warning that collective action would punish directly any nation that resumed aggression in Korea.<sup>53</sup>

Geneva opened a new phase in the Sino-American confrontation, shifting the contest to the diplomatic stage. Beijing was acutely aware that this was its first opportunity to establish itself as a major actor in regional, as well as world politics. But the Eisenhower administration was determined to prevent this outcome. Throughout the conference, the United States made every effort to maintain its hostile posture against the

PRC, denigrating Beijing's position or refusing to recognize its status. Most famously, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, upon a chance encounter, extended his hand to U.S. Secretary of State Dulles, who, instead of shaking it, turned and walked away in an astonishing display of disrespect.<sup>54</sup> But these American actions proved futile because it was clear to all the conference participants that the PRC was an essential major player in addressing the issues.<sup>55</sup> This was especially true when, on May 7, talks began on Indochina, the day that French forces surrendered at Dien Bien Phu. This defeat came after the United States chose not to intervene after failing to gain support from its allies and its people for air strikes to save the garrison. Progress toward a settlement followed because France wanted to withdraw. In July, Moscow and Beijing persuaded Ho Chi Minh to accept the Geneva Accords that Britain played a central role in negotiating, which provided for separate governments in Laos and Cambodia and temporary division of Vietnam until elections for reunification in 1956. Not only did the United States not participate in the discussions or sign the agreement, it acted quickly to divide Vietnam permanently. As another barrier to contain Chinese expansion, it organized the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization at Manila in September 1954.<sup>56</sup>

Beijing had joined with Moscow in persuading a reluctant Ho Chi Minh to accept the compromise of temporary division at Geneva to deter U.S. military intervention. But it also had played a major role in exposing the United States as a "paper tiger" in allowing the Viet Minh to defeat the French. Chinese leaders already were trumpeting their military success in the Korean War, rightfully taking credit for defending North Korea against American imperialism. Mao and his associates, to be sure, used such anti-colonial nationalist appeals to unify the populace behind China's new Communist government. Indeed, after the Korean War began, they had initiated the "Resist America Aid Korea" campaign to energize popular support behind mass mobilization for possible war. Chinese leaders encouraged anti-Americanism as well because uniting the people against a common enemy was a useful tool to build internal political control.<sup>57</sup> Intense fear and hatred of the United States, however, did not become a powerful weapon for Beijing in domestic politics until the Korean War and neutralization of Taiwan. The PRC condemned the U.S. policy reversal, denouncing defense of Jiang's illegal regime as blatant interference in China's internal affairs.<sup>58</sup> U.S. protection of the rival Guomindang government on Taiwan, a mere one hundred miles from the southeast mainland, constituted not only a political challenge, but also a military threat because of Jiang's determination to regain power. Guomindang retention of the offshore islands of Jinmen and

Mazu, just a few miles off the coast, was even more disturbing, since they were indisputably Chinese territory and provided a base for military operations.<sup>59</sup>

China's entry into the Korean War, Robert Accinelli writes, motivated the United States to adopt a "fixed defensive commitment" to Jiang's regime on Taiwan. Thereafter, increasing U.S. military support for the ROC provided Beijing with abundant evidence to justify its charges that Washington was determined to overthrow China's new government. By January 1951, the Truman administration had delivered to Taiwan \$29 million in military assistance when the Defense Department advocated approval of a U.S. military survey group's recommendation to allocate \$71.2 million more for fiscal 1951. Thereafter, the State Department negotiated with Jiang's government a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement that gave legal foundation for the use of U.S. military aid for Taiwan's internal security and self-defense. Joint support from State and Defense in March 1951 resulted in the creation of a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) on Taiwan, with responsibilities that included receipt and distribution military aid and advising the Guomindang on military training and organization. By 1952, MAAG personnel had risen to 770 Americans, who worked with the ROC to reorganize its armed forces to twenty-one army divisions from thirty-one divisions, as well as modernizing its small air force and navy.<sup>60</sup> Truman's policy, however, concentrated on creating just enough military strength on Taiwan to deter a Chinese Communist attack, thereby preventing a conflict that he did not want to expand beyond Korea. By contrast, Eisenhower agreed with Dulles that the PRC was an aberration, but he was vague about whether the United States should encourage Jiang's return to the mainland.<sup>61</sup>

Eisenhower's "unleashing" of Jiang Jieshi early in February 1953 signaled a change in the U.S. policy of provocation toward the PRC regarding Taiwan not just in words but in deeds as well. On February 5, the MAAG's Chief General William Chase suggested to the ROC that it draft a plan to blockade the mainland and increase the frequency of raids against the PRC. But the Eisenhower administration asked the ROC not to utilize aircraft in these forays and to consult with Washington beforehand about military operations exceeding five hundred men. After the PRC sent troops to Korea in October 1950, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) started to train Jiang's forces on how to conduct guerrilla-style commando raids against the PRC from the ROC-held offshore islands and northern Burma. By the end of 1950, the Guomindang claimed it had staged 1.5 million anti-Communist guerrilla attacks on the mainland. After two more years, Nationalist hit-and-run

raids had immobilized at least 200,000 PLA forces in Southeast China, and killed or wounded 41,727 Communist troops. Jiang anticipated an expansion of U.S. support for Guomintang military harassment of the PRC when Eisenhower became president in January 1953, pressing Washington to provide F-84 jet fighters. Like his predecessor, the new president, however, did not want the ROC to provoke a war and approved the request only after Jiang, on April 23, pledged not to “alter patterns and tempo of operations” against the mainland.<sup>62</sup>

Beijing, unaware of Eisenhower’s private caution, paid attention to his public bravado and prepared for the worst on the eve of the Korean armistice. ROC military attacks against the mainland during the war elevated seizing the occupied offshore islands to a high priority, setting the stage for the first Taiwan Strait crisis. “On July 16,” Cheng-yi Lin reports, “the Guomintang launched a large-scale amphibious attack against Tungsban Island in Fukien Province, and later made an air strike to cover withdrawal from the island.” Washington protested to the ROC that it had staged the air raid without securing prior U.S. clearance as required, receiving in response a promise against repetition. Shortly thereafter, however, the Eisenhower administration extended its military aid and training program to the offshore islands, including Jinmen and Mazu, as well as transferring two more destroyers to the ROC. For Beijing, the United States was determined that the Guomintang would hold the offshore islands as a springboard for an attack on the PRC. Indeed, Jiang insisted on holding Jinmen and Mazu as at least symbols of his hope to return and regain power on the mainland. Eisenhower and Dulles, however, thought the islands were more trouble than they were worth and preferred evacuation, but never conveyed this belief explicitly to Beijing. The president also was reluctant to sign a mutual defense pact, refusing to submit to Guomintang pressure in 1953 that intensified after the Geneva Conference and culminated in the submission in December of a draft treaty. Washington thus continued a policy dating from the start of the Korean War to limit its commitment of support of the ROC government.<sup>63</sup>

In September 1954, Beijing massed roughly 2.5 million soldiers in Fujian Province and then commenced shelling offshore islands and air strikes against the Dachen islands.<sup>64</sup> Beijing started to bombard Jinmen in September 1954. Predictably, Eisenhower and his advisors saw this as the opening gun of a military campaign aimed at seizing Taiwan. Instead, Beijing’s intent was to warn the United States not to sign a defense treaty with the ROC and persuade it to cease its hostile policies toward the PRC. Exaggerating the threat, the president adopted a strategy of ambiguity, making neither a public commitment to support or

oppose the ROC's defense of the offshore islands. Eisenhower sought to avoid direct U.S. involvement not least because the JCS advised that holding them against a full-scale PRC assault would require using nuclear weapons. To show U.S. resolve, he approved the U.S.-China Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954 and Dulles persuaded Britain and New Zealand to submit the issue to the United Nations. When Beijing captured a small island two hundred miles north of Taiwan early in 1955, Dulles prevailed on Jiang to evacuate the nearby Dachen islands in return for a pledge of U.S. protection for Jinmen and Mazu. Eisenhower also rejected Jiang's request for U.S. consent to stage attacks on PRC air bases. Public provocation, however, continued, as administration statements hinted at the use of tactical nuclear weapons if war broke out. Then, in April, JCS Chair Admiral Arthur W. Radford traveled to Taiwan to inform Jiang that Eisenhower had revoked his promise to defend Jinmen and Mazu. In response to an offer of U.S. support for a blockade of sea lanes along the China coast, Jiang angrily declared that he would defend the islands with or without U.S. support.<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, on January 31, 1955, the UN Security Council had placed the Taiwan issue on its agenda and invited the PRC to participate in discussions. That Beijing rejected the offer was hardly surprising given that two days earlier, the U.S. Congress had approved the Formosa Resolution, authorizing U.S. military action to protect Taiwan and such related territories as the president deemed necessary. Eisenhower refused to issue a public commitment of U.S. support for defense of Jinmen and Mazu and gave Jiang only a secret pledge of U.S. assistance in case of an attack "at this time."<sup>66</sup> But from Beijing's viewpoint, the United States was committed firmly to Jiang's retention of the offshore islands as physical evidence of the ROC's claim to be the legitimate government of China. Reinforcing this judgment was the Eisenhower administration's adamant opposition to admission of the PRC to the United Nations. In June 1951, Acheson had presented one reason for exclusion, declaring that "a claimant for seating cannot shoot his way into the UN and cannot get in by defying the UN and fighting its forces."<sup>67</sup> Assistant Secretary Rusk, however, captured the visceral hostility that perpetuated this policy earlier in May when he stated that the Beijing "regime may be a colonial Russian government—a Slavic Manchukuo on a larger scale. It is not the Government of China," he maintained. "It is not entitled to speak for China in the community of nations."<sup>68</sup> Thereafter, annual Congressional resolutions threatened to end U.S. participation in the United Nations if it voted to oust the Guomindang government.

## **China's Revolutionary Diplomacy**

In November 1951, the UN General Assembly approved Thailand's resolution not to consider any changes in Chinese representation. The United States annually gained passage of a similar moratorium measure until 1960.<sup>69</sup> Despite U.S. efforts at diplomatic isolation, however, the Korean War had made it plain to the majority of Asian and African leaders in particular that Mao's government now was firmly in power and Jiang's regime never would change that reality. Beijing saw this de facto recognition as the first step toward the PRC achieving its fourth major objective of establishing a position of leadership in the international community outside of the United Nations. Two wars, however, had weakened China's economy, limiting its ability to act as a benefactor. Instead, Beijing worked to enhance its image as a champion of anti-imperialism, identifying itself as a strong proponent of former victims of colonial rule in efforts to assert their independence.<sup>70</sup> Grounding its claim to world leadership in becoming the foremost supporter in helping liberate people worldwide from the American imperialists had great appeal to Mao and his associates for both ideological and security reasons. By assisting nations to free themselves from imperialist domination, Beijing could win new allies who would support its aims in world politics, as well as divert U.S. military, economic, and diplomatic resources away from policies directed at weakening the PRC. Another factor was pressure from Moscow to replicate its new "peaceful coexistence" strategy. After Beijing ended shelling of the offshore islands in February 1955, the Soviets offered to provide it with assistance to develop peaceful nuclear power and a large commercial credit in return for a promise to postpone active attempts to seize Taiwan.<sup>71</sup>

Beijing's strategy to elevate China's reputation as a leader in the anti-imperialist struggle had its roots in Maoist ideology. Shortly after World War II ended, Mao explained to American journalist Anna Louise Strong that before the United States could attack the Soviet Union and ignite another world war, it first would have to subjugate the nations of Europe, Asia, and Africa, an area he called the "vast intermediate zone" between the imperialist and the socialist countries. To prevent a U.S. imperialist attack on the socialist Soviet Union, he reasoned, was to intensify the struggle especially among former victims of colonialism against the United States in this intermediate zone. After triumphing in China's civil war, Mao also concluded that ensuring the success of revolutionary movements in the developing countries would enhance the security of the revolutionary state he had founded in China.<sup>72</sup> The PRC had the first opportunity to become the leader of the intermediate zone in

April 1955 when it attended the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. One year earlier, at the conclusion of the gathering of the heads of the governments of Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, India, and Pakistan at Colombo, Ceylon, participants had issued a joint statement that proposed a wider international meeting of post-colonial states to deal with common problems. African and Asian leaders agreed that the issues would include colonialism, racism, international economic and social cooperation, human rights, and world peace.<sup>73</sup>

Under the sponsorship of the Colombo powers, representatives from twenty-nine Asian and African countries attended the Bandung Conference from April 18 to 24. Although there were notable exclusions from the conference, including the ROC and the two Koreas, the nations present did represent a quarter of the world's land area and two-thirds of its population. Elected as president of the body was Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo of Indonesia, who was the prime mover behind organization of the meeting. The nations in attendance included neutrals, as well as bloc members, representing all political ideologies. The delegates engaged in remarkably free and frank exchanges, as three committees brokered compromises that led to reaching agreement on several key issues. First, there would be steps for national development, including promotion of intra-regional trade, export diversification, and the undertaking of collective action to stabilize demand for primary basic commodities. Second, participants would sponsor cultural exchanges of information and artists to acquire knowledge of each other's countries. Third, worldwide self-determination received overwhelming support. Pledging to eradicate racism, the delegates also declared that colonialism in all its manifestations was "an evil which should speedily be brought to an end." Finally, the conferees urged liberation of French North Africa, states in Arabia under British protection, and West Irian, a territory Indonesia claimed, but still under Dutch rule.<sup>74</sup>

Bandung initiated a new spirit of cooperation among non-Western nations and provided encouragement for the non-aligned movement in a bipolar world. The conferees also passed the Bandung Declaration of Peace, calling for the destruction of all nuclear arsenals and universal disarmament. They recommended greater Afro-Asian representation in the United Nations and on its Security Council. Attempting to mitigate, rather than inflame Cold War tensions, the final communiqué did not endorse a UN seat for the PRC. But Beijing fully exploited its participation to project cooperation and cordiality, discrediting U.S. characterizations of Communist China as evil and predatory. Zhou Enlai represented the PRC and was a model of collaboration, winning respect, admiration, and gratitude from all the other delegates. His efforts were

instrumental in formulation, advocacy, and approval of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” calling for respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference of nations in the internal affairs of others, equality of economic treatment, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>75</sup> Zhou’s virtuoso performance was instrumental in the rapid rise of Beijing’s prestige and influence in the developing world, as the PRC’s display of moderation and conciliation contrasted sharply with a U.S.-promoted image of Communist China as militant and subversive. Beijing became an active proponent of the “Spirit of Bandung” that encouraged an extension of the non-aligned areas of peace around the world to balance the major powers.<sup>76</sup> The PRC’s diplomatic strategy sought to isolate the “paper tiger” and to create a bloc of neutral nations under its leadership.

Beijing remained on the diplomatic offensive against the United States after Bandung. On April 23, 1955, even before the conference ended, Zhou publicly proposed “to sit down and enter into negotiations with the U.S. government to discuss . . . the question of relaxing tension in the Taiwan area.”<sup>77</sup> Beijing’s purpose was to compel the United States to deal directly with the PRC as equal, thereby indirectly recognizing its national dignity and world power status. On October 1, 1949, Mao had declared on the establishment of the PRC that “we have stood up” and promised that China would “never again be an insulted nation.”<sup>78</sup> Beijing’s fifth foreign policy objective after the Korean War was to force the “paper tiger” to negotiate with the PRC, while at the same time pursuing the contradictory and unproductive policy of formal diplomatic isolation.

On July 25, 1955, Washington and Beijing announced that ambassadorial-level talks would occur to help resolve the repatriation of civilians and “to facilitate further discussions and settlement of certain other practical matters now at issue between both sides.” On August 1, the first of 138 meetings convened in Geneva—moved to Warsaw in 1958—that for fifteen years was the only regular channel of direct communication between the United States and the PRC. The first issue for discussion was mutual repatriation of detained citizens, an issue that representatives from the two sides had discussed at the Geneva Conference. Contrary to past diplomatic dealings, these Sino-American negotiations in each instance proceeded on a basis of equality and reciprocity. While ritualized exchange of rhetoric was the norm, they would provide an efficient means for communication of national interests and limitation of the areas of mutual conflict.<sup>79</sup>

Fears of a Sino-American war after the Taiwan Strait crisis caused several governments to offer mediation, but Dulles chose direct

negotiations, apparently because he did not trust third parties to protect U.S. interests. On September 10, talks at Geneva resulted in U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia U. Alexis Johnson and PRC Ambassador to Poland Wang Bingnan issuing an “agreed announcement” declaring that civilians of both countries who wished to return to their respective nations could do so and repatriation would occur “expeditiously.” This would be the only agreement that the negotiations would produce, although it did not resolve the issue swiftly. Washington had lifted the last restrictions on the departure of Chinese nationals before the talks began, but Beijing argued that Americans in Chinese prisons were there lawfully for espionage or other crimes. Nevertheless, the PRC began to release the incarcerated slowly until only two CIA agents remained. During October 1955, discussions shifted to a U.S. proposal for a mutual renunciation of force in the Taiwan area, but the two sides remained far apart. Wang demanded “mutual respect for territorial integrity”—indicative of the PRC’s claim to Taiwan—and Johnson insisted on the right of “individual and collective self-defense”—an assertion of the legal validity of the ROC and the U.S. defense treaty with it. While Washington was inflexible in perpetuating China’s division, Beijing was just as adamant that Taiwan was an inalienable part of China. For the PRC, U.S. defense of Taiwan prevented real peace in the area. “Any plot to slice off Chinese territory and create ‘two Chinas’ will not be tolerated,” Yu Chao-li stated defiantly in 1959.<sup>80</sup>

Other issues were similarly stalemated. American insincerity ensured this result, given that Dulles agreed to the ambassadorial talks only to pacify U.S. allies and discourage the PRC from resuming attacks on Jinmen and Mazu. Wang proposed the exchanges of newsmen, the opening of trade, and the exchange of diplomatic missions, but Johnson predictably rejected the offer because Washington judged acceptance as tantamount to *de jure* recognition. Beijing’s invitation in 1956 for the visit of fifteen newsmen to China met rejection from the United States through the denial of passports. In August 1957, Washington bowed to pressure and validated a limited number of visas for travel to China, but agreed only to “individual” entry of the Chinese newsmen after great scrutiny. Beijing condemned the proposal as the equivalent of an “unequal treaty” and vetoed the proposed exchange of correspondents.<sup>81</sup> When Johnson left his post in Prague at the end of 1957, Dulles proposed downgrading the Geneva talks, but Beijing objected. Washington’s refusal to name a replacement resulted in a lapse of meetings for several months, causing Chinese leaders to feel deeply insulted. Beijing angrily explained that “what the United States was aiming at . . . was by no means a peaceful settlement of the international dispute between China

and the United States on the basis of equality and mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty. . . . This cannot but rouse the indignation of the Chinese people.”<sup>82</sup> Collapse of the Geneva talks culminated a series of events that persuaded the PRC by early 1958 that the United States never would accept its legitimacy or bargain with it as an equal.

### **Dealing with a Not-so-Paper Tiger**

Beijing abandoned its reliance on what Xia labels “tension” diplomacy to diminish the threat from the “paper tiger” almost five years after the end of the Korean War, shifting instead to an emphasis on developing the economic and military strength necessary to meet and defeat any American challenge. As is well known, Mao now began to assert his preference for a more militant, revolutionary approach in domestic and foreign policy. To be sure, U.S. behavior was not the primary factor in motivating this shift, but it was not irrelevant. Washington’s decision to support South Vietnam in not holding elections in July 1956 justified the PRC’s support for Ho Chi Minh in implementing a more aggressive strategy in Indochina. Nikita Khrushchev’s speech denouncing Stalin had created doubts for Mao about whether the Soviet Union remained devoted to Marxism-Leninism. In September 1957, the Soviet launching of Sputnik convinced Mao that the socialist camp now held the advantage and should exploit its superior power to challenge and defeat U.S. imperialism.<sup>83</sup> But Khrushchev opposed direct confrontation and preferred peaceful competition with the United States. He wanted to reduce Cold War tensions because he feared that an aggressive approach might ignite a nuclear war. Beijing and Moscow would split on this and other important issues. Chinese leaders did not want war because they respected U.S. power. Certain that the United States was internally weak and destined to collapse, Beijing nevertheless understood that “tactically, they are real tigers which can devour human beings.”<sup>84</sup>

Warren I. Cohen has written that the postwar confrontation between Washington and Beijing constituted the “great aberration” in U.S. China policy. Traditionally, the United States had supported the “existence of a strong, independent China,” but in early 1950 it “forgot the sound geopolitical, economic, and ethical basis of their historic desire for China’s well being” and embarked on “an unprecedented campaign of opposition to the development of a strong, modern China.”<sup>85</sup> In fact, this did not occur until the Korean War, replacing a united China with one permanently divided and substituting economic sanctions for an open door. Thereafter, the United States exerted immense effort to ensure that

the PRC would not become the “policeman” of Asia, but in doing so after the Korean armistice Washington actually moved Beijing closer to achieving most of its five major foreign policy objectives.<sup>86</sup> By 1956, China reached a plateau of early success, boasting a strong government that was fostering economic growth. Beijing’s main tool for exerting influence in world politics was application of political and diplomatic pressure, notwithstanding Mao’s oft-quoted statement that “power flows out of the barrel of a gun.”<sup>87</sup> But Chinese leaders soon concluded that diplomacy no longer would be effective in ending persistent U.S. efforts to weaken and destroy the PRC. American leaders were not prepared to deal with a revolutionary China, but it was the Korean War that instilled in them exaggerated fears leading to adoption of unrealistic and threatening policies. Eventually, Beijing responded in kind.

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<sup>1</sup> “United States Policy Toward Formosa,” *Department of State Bulletin [DSB]*, vol. 22 (January 16, 1950), p. 79; Dean G. Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 351; Robert Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy Toward Taiwan, 1950-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 6-16.

<sup>2</sup> Simei Qing, “From Grand China Strategy to US-China Confrontation in Korea: Assessment of Intentions in Time of Crisis,” Symposium on “The Legacy of Harry S. Truman in East Asia: Japan, China, and the Two Koreas,” Truman Little White House, Key West, FL, May 15, 2010. Arnold Xiangze Jiang notes the contradictions in U.S. policy, stressing how Washington was not willing to recognize China’s new government and treat it as an equal. Arnold Xiangze Jiang, *The United States and China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 134-37.

<sup>3</sup> Dean G. Acheson, “Crisis in Asia: An Examination of United States Policy,” *DSB*, vol. 22 (January 16, 1950), pp. 111-17.

<sup>4</sup> *China: U.S. Policy Since 1945* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1980), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> William Whitney Stueck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 125; Warren I. Cohen, “Symposium: Rethinking the Lost Chance in China?,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter, 1997), pp. 283-89; Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 64-69; Jiang, *The United States and China*, pp. 137-38.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990),

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pp. 63-65, 70-75; Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment*, pp. 20-23; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. II: *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1950-1953* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 157-68.

<sup>7</sup> Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman* (New York: Viking Press, 1987), pp. 43-154; Mark A. Stoler, *George C. Marshall: Soldier-Statesman of the American Century* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), pp. 145-51; Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 287-305.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Stalin to V.N. Roshchin with message for Mao Zedong, 16 May 1950, in Kathryn Weathersby, "Should We Fear This?: Stalin and the Korean War," Conference on "Stalin and the Cold War," Yale University, September 23-25, 1999, pp. 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Korean War and Sino-American Relations," in Harry Harding and Yuan Ming (eds.), *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1989), pp. 213-37. See also, Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment*, pp. 29-30; Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, pp. 178-81; Jiang, *The United States and China*, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, Vol. II: *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), p. 354; William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 67-69; John W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), pp. 65-77.

<sup>11</sup> James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 226-27, 253-58.

<sup>12</sup> Roshchin to Stalin, September 3, 1950, in Evgeniy P. Bajanov and Natalia Bajanov, *The Korean Conflict, 1950-1953: The Most Mysterious War of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995), pp. 89-90.

<sup>13</sup> Zhihua Shen, "China and the Dispatch of the Soviet Air Force: The Formation of the Chinese-Soviet-Korean Alliance in the Early Stage of the Korean War," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 33, No. 2 (April, 2010), pp. 212-16.

<sup>14</sup> James I. Matray, "Truman's Plan for Victory: National Self-Determination and the Thirty-Eighth Parallel Decision in Korea," *Journal of American History*, vol. 66, No. 2 (September, 1979), pp. 312-33.

<sup>15</sup> Shen, "China and the Dispatch of the Soviet Air Force," p. 222; Qing, "From Grand China Strategy to US-China Confrontation in Korea," p. 6; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War*, pp. 98-99, 123-28; Jiang, *The United States and China*, pp. 141-43; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, pp. 79-80.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr., *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp. 15, 44, 71.

<sup>18</sup> David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), pp. 184-95.

<sup>19</sup> Burton I. Kaufman, *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1986), pp. 30-32.

<sup>20</sup> Stueck, *The Korean War*, pp. 138-39, 151-57; Jiang, *The United States and China*, p. 144.

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