

Southern New Hampshire University

Misperceptions of Ignorance:

Reconsidering U.S. Intelligence “Failures” in the Korean War

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in
Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

By

Daniel Brown Compton

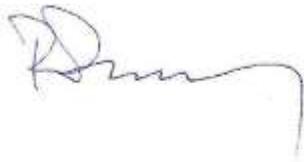
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Abstract

The ongoing American popular perception that the United States committed significant intelligence failures during Korean War is certainly understandable, especially given that this view continues to persist within the scholarly consensus on the topic. However, historian Richard C. Thornton asserts compelling arguments to the contrary, which, when combined with careful examination of the relevant primary source evidence, help to unravel how conscious American policy decisions can explain these supposed intelligence failures. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the U.S. use of intelligence during the Korean conflict relative to that of its three communist adversaries—North Korea, China, and Russia—reveals not only that the U.S. did not commit any significant intelligence failures, but leveraged intelligence much more effectively during the North Korean invasion, Chinese intervention, and in the pursuit of strategic goals.

An application of John A. Gentry's intelligence failure analysis methodology further reveals that the three communist nations' failures can all be directly attributed to their respective leaders, while intelligence agencies bare the blame for supposed U.S. failures. These results suggest a fundamental difference between the U.S. and the other three nations' approaches to the use of intelligence. The communist nations relied on the abilities of one man to leverage all of the available intelligence in his decisions, while the American approach was one of policy-driven interpretation and action on intelligence. This difference in approaches to intelligence seems to explain how the U.S. managed to avoid the mistakes so frequently made by its adversaries, and why the U.S. used intelligence so much more effectively relative to the three communist nations.

Dedication

To my father, whose benevolent example humbles and guides me;
my beloved, spirited mother; my dearest friend, Hannah; and my finest product, Yxta.

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There are many more who undoubtedly merit mention here, so if I have yet neglected to express my appreciation to you in person or otherwise, I sincerely thank you now. I have had the good fortune to work and learn with many fine people, and I hope to continue that trend in the future.

Daniel B. Compton

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List of Abbreviations

AFSA	Armed Forces Security Agency
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
KGB	Committee for State Security (Russian)
NKA	North Korean Army
PLA	People's Liberation Army (Chinese)
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (Russia)

Introduction

Within American public perception, and even among many past and current historians, the notion that the Korean War encompassed some glaring examples of U.S. intelligence failures persists.¹ Chief among these allegations are that U.S. intelligence failed to predict and provide adequate warning of the two key events during the conflict—the June 1950 North Korean invasion south of the 38th parallel, and the November 1950 Chinese military intervention in the war. Critics of U.S. intelligence performance include these “failures” among a list of notable mishaps in American military history, ranging from Pearl Harbor in 1941, to the Tet Offensive of 1968, and into the twenty-first century, with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

However, a comparative analysis of the U.S. and its three primary adversaries in the Korean War— Russia, China, and North Korea—and their corresponding use of intelligence in key decisions surrounding these two major events, reveals that the U.S. used such information more effectively than these adversaries. Further, similar comparative analyses of each nation’s use of intelligence towards meeting its overall strategic objectives for entering the conflict strongly indicate that the U.S. leveraged intelligence much more successfully and achieved its goals to a greater degree than any of the three communist nations it faced during the war.

¹ For historians’ assertions alleging U.S. intelligence failures during the Korean War, see, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) Kindle Edition, 107; Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995) 185; Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 170; and Michael Sheng, “Mao’s Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision,” *Twentieth Century China* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 270, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1521538514Z.00000000048>.

The Korean War began with the initial North Korean attack in June 1950, as the communist North Korean Leader, Kim Il Sung, flung his forces across the 38th parallel in an effort to overthrow the U.S.-allied South Korean Republic of Korea (ROK) government and unify the Korean peninsula under his control.² Kim's military received training, war planning guidance, and logistical support from Stalin's Soviet Union, and his North Korean forces experienced initial success, pushing the ROK and U.S. forces to the southeastern corner of the peninsula and surrounded the remaining ROK and U.S. forces at Pusan by the fall of 1950.³ The American public, harboring fresh concerns following the dual events of the Soviets' successful test of a nuclear weapon and the establishment of a communist Chinese state in 1949, undoubtedly fretted over how the Truman administration could be caught so apparently flat-footed in the face of communist expansion.⁴

Then, on September 15, 1950, General MacArthur conducted a successful amphibious landing at Inchon, just west of Seoul, and U.S.-led United Nations (U.N.) forces began pushing the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel.⁵ A few months thereafter, in November 1950, Mao ordered several hundred thousand Chinese troops into North Korea, and these forces soon began engaging U.S. forces.⁶ While historians diverge on the extent to which

² Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010) Kindle Edition, Location 325.

³ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 147; Cumings, 451-453.

⁴ Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project* (November 1993), 6, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Working_Paper_8.pdf.

⁵ Cumings, Locations 489-90.

⁶ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010) Kindle Edition, Locations 634-7.

American intelligence understood and warned of the threat posed by Chinese intervention, the predominant, consensus view argues that U.S. intelligence failed to give policymakers accurate Chinese personnel strength estimates or adequate warning of the threat.⁷

As of the writing of this work in the spring of 2017, the historiography of the Korean War and the use of intelligence within that conflict appears to lack a focused scholarly effort to comparatively analyze the U.S. use of intelligence during the Korean conflict relative to that of the three primary nations allied against it: North Korea, China, and Russia. Without such analysis to provide comparative context, many historians and the public alike appear unreasonably critical of any perceived or actual lack of warning from American intelligence of a significant event or attack. As intelligence scholar John A. Gentry explains, “Chronic perceptions of failure suggest that unless American intelligence professionals are much more incompetent than even harsh critics suggest, a basic problem lies in inappropriate expectations about the performance of U.S. intelligence agencies.”⁸ Comparative analyses of American, North Korean, Chinese, and Russian uses of intelligence in decisions surrounding the initial North Korean invasion, the Chinese military intervention, as well as of these nations’ efforts towards

⁷ For examples from the consensus view of the U.S. intelligence failure to predict Chinese intervention, see Goncharov et al., 170 and Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: An Interpretative History* (London: Routledge, 1999), 111-2, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=84679&site=eds-live&scope=site>; For examples of assertions arguing that U.S. intelligence accurately warned policymakers of the Chinese intervention, see Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 350-1 and Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 180, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

⁸ John A. Gentry, “Intelligence Failure Reframed,” *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 247, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20203011>.

achieving their respective strategic war aims, provides the potential for a balanced context from which historians may make objective assessments of all four governments' relative effectiveness.

As the focus of this paper will center on various nations' use of intelligence, it seems that a clear, relevant definition of the term "intelligence" as it pertains to the subject matter at hand is a prerequisite to forming any meaningful arguments involving this term. In a 1958 article published in a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) publication, Charles T. Bimfort asserts, "Intelligence is the collecting and processing of that information about foreign countries and their agents which is needed by a government for its foreign policy and for national security, the conduct of non-attributable activities abroad to facilitate the implementation of foreign policy, and the protection of both process and product, as well as persons and organizations concerned with these, against unauthorized disclosure."⁹ The key points in Bimfort's definition are that intelligence involves not only the collection, analysis, and dissemination, but also the protection of information and the collectors thereof which facilitate a given nation's ability to conduct foreign policy and ensure national security (to include combat operations) with or against other nations.

Bimfort also notes that intelligence need not necessarily derive from covert or secret action, although it obviously includes such information, and that it encompasses the protection of internal "processes and product," or how a nation collects, analyzes, and disseminates strategic

⁹ Charles T. Bimfort, "A Definition of Intelligence," *Studies in Intelligence* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1958): 78, accessed February 7, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol2no4/html/v02i4a08p_0001.htm.

information, as well as preventing the release of finished documents to unauthorized audiences.¹⁰

In short, intelligence involves the use of any information which one nation can use to gain advantage over other nations, and it is on this simplified definition that this paper will base relative arguments. As the historical record of the Korean conflict indicates, the diplomatic and military interactions between the U.S., North Korea, China, and Russia rarely, if ever, prove detached from intelligence.

Given the prevalent role which intelligence, as defined above, played within these nations' interrelations during the war, an ample amount of primary and secondary sources exist through which to comparatively analyze the four countries' use of this information within the contexts of specific events and their respective strategic goals. Thus, this paper seeks to address two critical questions: First, how credible are the allegations that the U.S. committed intelligence failures in its inability to predict or prepare for the North Korean invasion of June 1950 and the Chinese military intervention of November 1950? Second, how effective was the U.S. use of intelligence during the conflict relative to that of North Korea, China, and Russia? Through a careful examination of all four nations' actions through the three distinct contexts of the North Korean invasion, the Chinese intervention, and each country's strategic war aims, the totality of the evidence strongly suggests that while U.S. intelligence agencies suffered from systemic dysfunction, and certainly made tactical errors, its use of intelligence during those two key events did not constitute intelligence failures. Further, the analysis reveals that the U.S. not only

¹⁰ Charles T. Bimfort, "A Definition of Intelligence," *Studies in Intelligence* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1958): 78, accessed February 7, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol2no4/html/v02i4a08p_0001.htm.

proved more effective than all three of its main adversaries in its use of strategic information during those two crucial events, but it also proved the most successful of the four in achieving its overall strategic objectives for the war through intelligence.

Chapter 1: Odd Man Out(side) of the Consensus: Richard C. Thornton

Within the rather narrow topical scope of the use of intelligence surrounding the two pivotal events in the first year of the Korean War, one historian stands out as the chief dissenting opinion, arguing against the scholarly consensus view that the U.S. failed in its predictive analysis and issuance of early warnings for these events. In his 2000 *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*, Richard C. Thornton cites numerous pertinent primary sources to support his arguments that U.S. intelligence not only detected and predicted both of these impending threats, but issued advanced warning of these developments to U.S. policymakers and war planners.

For instance, Thornton notes that U.S. Army War Plan SL-17, which ““was approved, printed and distributed to the General Staff and the technical services early in the week of 19 June, 1950,”” (six days prior to the North Korean invasion) details “an assumed invasion by the North, ‘a retreat to and defense of the Pusan perimeter, buildup *and breakout and an amphibious landing at Inchon to cut enemy supply lines.*””¹ Such use of a primary source to compellingly argue that U.S. intelligence was not only aware of the impending North Korean invasion, but

¹ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 181, 180; For a discussion of SL-17 relative to South Korean preparations for the invasion, as well as MacArthur’s Inchon landings, see Myunglim Park, “The ‘American Boundary’, Provocation, and the Outbreak of the Korean War,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 1, no. 1 (1998): 52-5, accessed May 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/stable/30209237>; For translated excerpts from South Korean Army plans which reflect U.S. War Plan SL-17, see “Yukgun chakjôn myôngryông 38ho’ (Army Headquarters Strategic Order No. 38) (March 25, 1950),” “Yukgun che 6 sadan chakjôn myôngryông 42ho” (Army 6th Division Strategic Order No. 42) (May 18, 1950), Kukpangbu chônpyôn’ui saryo che 562 ho, che 740 ho (Ministry of Defense Materials of War History Compilation Committee, Document Nos. 562 and 740), as cited in Park 53-4; For a classified U.S. Department of Defense study linked to SL-17, see “Mobilization Requirements Program of the Army Logistic Study for Projected Operations (LD-SL-17),” National Archives, Records Group 319, E 97, Army: Operations General Decimal File 1950–1951 091, Korea Box 34, also cited in Park, 53-4.

predicted it and produced war plans accordingly, exemplifies much of Thornton's approach to the topical debate of whether the U.S. committed intelligence failures during the war.

Beyond this extremely detailed, and what would prove prophetic war plan, Thornton points to the pre-invasion U.S. intelligence discovery of a "massive Soviet supply effort" to North Korea, which by some estimates included 65 Russian T-34 tanks.² Thornton also explains that in late April 1950, "Under the command of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, former commander of the U.S. Army in Korea," "the U.S. Army and Air Force jointly carried out Operation Swarmer, a 60,000-man, 600-plane exercise designed to...air drop a multi-division armed force, specifically to stop a tank-led assault."³ That the U.S. military held this training exercise just three months prior to the North Korean invasion, it was specifically designed to halt a tank-led assault, and that the former commander of U.S. Army forces in Korea led it, all strongly point to U.S. preparations for, and thus prior knowledge of, a North Korean assault across the 38th parallel.

Further, Thornton states, "...in what was a remarkable coincidence if the invasion was truly unexpected, the day before the North Korean attack, the U.S. Army alerted 'all combat units of the Army...for tests that will determine how quickly they could start moving toward ports of embarkation in an emergency.'"⁴ A prophetic war plan, the intelligence discovery of large shipments of tanks from Russia to North Korea, a training exercise to combat a tank-led

² Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 109.

³ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 181. Thornton cites a June 25, 1950 *New York Times* article reporting on this Army-wide alert status. For this article, see "Army Combat Units Alerted for Tests," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), June 25, 1950, accessed May 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1950/06/25/archives/army-combat-units-alerted-for-tests-maneuver-will-show-readiness-to.html>.

assault, and an Army-wide test the day before the actual invasion designed to prepare for an emergency all strongly suggest that U.S. intelligence detected and warned policymakers of the impending North Korean invasion, and that war planners were preparing accordingly.

Despite Thornton's persuasive arguments, the majority of historians addressing the North Korean invasion offer opposing views on the matter, maintaining that invasion caught U.S. intelligence off guard, and that the Truman administration was unaware of the potential for such an attack. This consensus view may be seen in Melvyn P. Leffler's assertion that, "News of the invasion triggered alarm bells in Washington..." and in Marvin L. Kalb's contention that Truman was "shocked" by the news of the invasion.⁵ As these examples reflect, the assertions from the consensus often reference anecdotal reactions to the North Korean attack, whereas Thornton bases his arguments on the implications of primary source evidence directly pertinent to and reflective of the event.

As one reads the historiography of the Korean War, despite questions raised by such points from Thornton and others, it becomes apparent that many historians simply accept the notion that U.S. intelligence failed to detect and warn American policymakers of the impending North Korean attack. The majority of historians, it seems, perceive it as "common knowledge" that the North Korean invasion was a surprise to the American public, leadership, and intelligence alike. Those historians that do cite credible sources to support claims that U.S. intelligence failed in this regard often cite CIA assessments, resulting in conclusions which can

⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994), Kindle Edition, Locations 1478-80; Marvin L. Kalb, *The Road to War: Presidential Commitments Honored and Betrayed* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013) p14, accessed March 14, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=577350&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_C1.

prove to be based on incomplete data and context, as will become apparent later in this chapter, and receive detailed attention in Chapter 2.

Regarding the Chinese military intervention into the war, Thornton makes two key claims which starkly contrast with the consensus perspective that U.S. intelligence failed to detect, predict, and warn policymakers of this significant development which so significantly impacted the Korean combat theater. First, Thornton argues that by November 1950, “the huge deployment of [Chinese] troops border crossing points, the growing volume of communication between Beijing and its forces as well as signals intercepts of those communications, clearly revealed Beijing’s preparations to intervene.”⁶ Thornton argues that “one could not seriously argue” that U.S. military signals intelligence (SIGINT) capabilities at this stage of the war were so insufficient to fail in the detection of such communications, and that it was preposterous to conclude that the presence and implications of the substantial Chinese troop buildup recently staged near the Yalu River border area between China and Korea went unnoticed or reported to U.S. policymakers.⁷

On this particular issue involving U.S. SIGINT capabilities at the time of the Chinese intervention in Korea, a number of historians argue against Thornton’s position. For example, in his 1995 *For the President’s Eyes Only*, Christopher Andrew asserts, “The SIGINT warning before the Chinese offensive was...confused. The rapid expansion of SIGINT activities after the outbreak of war had produced...interservice rivalry.”⁸ However, while Andrew alludes to the dysfunction resulting from the rivalry between U.S. agencies conducting SIGINT collection

⁶ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 351.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 190.

operations, and places the blame for the “confused” warning of the Chinese intervention on this rivalry, the author provides no concrete examples of how these inter-agency tensions negatively impacted SIGINT warnings of the offensive.⁹ In fact, Andrew notes that Truman’s Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs at the time of the Chinese military offensive, Dean Rusk, admitted, ““Our intelligence did detect some movement of Chinese troops...,”” and Andrew even acknowledges, “The most important intelligence came from SIGINT.”¹⁰ Inexplicably, Andrew seems to include alleged U.S. SIGINT inadequacies in the blame for the “...false assumptions about total Soviet control of the entire Communist world that the White House did not question.”¹¹ While such assumptions represent possible errors in policymakers’ interpretations of intelligence, they provide no evidence of, nor does Andrew in his book, of insufficient warning of the Chinese military intervention from U.S. SIGINT sources.

In his 2013 *Understanding the Korean War*, Arthur H. Mitchell makes a crucial point of differentiating between the relative SIGINT successes of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, notably the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA). Mitchell notes that during the Korean conflict, the CIA “...made various claims about penetrating Communist communications and mobilizing anti-Communist elements in North Korea. With a few exceptions, however, its operations were failures.”¹² However, Mitchell also notes, “Although the Chinese armies moving north observed radio silence, beginning in July 1950 an [AFSA] listening post on Okinawa

⁹ Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 189-91.

¹⁰ Ibid., 189. Remarkably, Rusk seems to contradict these statements, claiming, “No one, including myself, foresaw any chance of Chinese intervention.” For further details, see Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Daniel S. Papp, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 162.

¹¹ Andrew, 190.

¹² Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 181, accessed February 22, 2017,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

indicated that the Chinese were moving hundreds of thousands of soldiers to Manchuria.”¹³ Further, Mitchell explains, the AFSA intercepted two crucial communications indicative of a Chinese intervention in Korea: “One, in early November [1950], was a radiotelephone call made by an Eastern European reporting that Chinese soldiers were being urged to volunteer to fight in Korea, as ‘we are already at war there.’ A transmission in mid–November [1950] requesting 30,000 copies of maps of Korea clearly indicated that the Chinese were about to make a move.”¹⁴ Clearly, U.S. intelligence detected and warned policymakers of the impending Chinese offensive, although, the author states, “MacArthur and company obviously refused to credit these reports.”¹⁵ Perhaps of equal significance, Mitchell’s differentiation between CIA SIGINT detection and warning of the attack with that of other U.S. intelligence agencies such as the AFSA highlights that historians citing only CIA intelligence reporting and assessments in their accusations of U.S. intelligence failures during the Korean War likely lack the full context of intelligence available to U.S. political and military decision makers.

Thornton’s second primary point of divergence from the consensus perspective concerning the Chinese military intervention involves the interactions between President Truman and General MacArthur following MacArthur’s September 15, 1950 landing at Inchon until the U.S. acknowledgement of Chinese military involvement on the peninsula in November 1950. Thornton contends that during the meeting between Truman and MacArthur on Wake Island, “Truman must have warned MacArthur not to acknowledge the early presence of ‘major’ Chinese forces in Korea should he encounter them, lest the [United Nations] allies demand a

¹³ Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 180, accessed February 22, 2017,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

premature withdrawal.”¹⁶ Thornton bases this argument on primary source documents which reveal fluctuations in MacArthur’s intelligence estimates of Chinese troop numbers fighting in Korea from before and after the Wake Island meeting.¹⁷ Thornton notes that prior to the Wake Island meeting between Truman and MacArthur, “MacArthur’s intelligence chief, General Willoughby, had reported heavy concentrations of Chinese troops, between 90,000 and 180,000, ‘massed at the border crossing points.’”¹⁸ However, Thornton points out, “On November 2, after Chinese troops in division strength had been identified in Korea (press accounts reported from 20,000 to 40,00) Willoughby estimated that only 16,500 Chinese troops were actually in Korea.”¹⁹ Thornton’s conclusion provides a possible explanation for the discrepancy in Chinese troop strength estimates.

Beyond Truman’s anxiety over losing the support of U.N. allies in the Korean theater should the full reality of Chinese military forces be revealed, Thornton explains that MacArthur skewed his own Chinese troop estimates to reflect those from the CIA, to which Truman adhered. Thornton states, “Truman’s instructions to MacArthur at Wake Island, it is fair to conclude, were based on the interpretation that while the Chinese were massing troops at border crossing points, they were not prepared for a full-scale intervention in 1950. That was the CIA’s view. Therefore, MacArthur should move quickly and present the Chinese with a fait accompli.”²⁰ However, Thornton points out that MacArthur “was plainly dubious” of the CIA assessment of Chinese intentions, as his own ‘unsurpassed’ intelligence “reported a capability to

¹⁶ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 359.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

intervene,” and, as Mitchell illuminates in his book, undoubtedly included AFSA SIGINT intercepts indicating an imminent, if not forgone, Chinese intervention.²¹ Nonetheless, Thornton continues, if MacArthur’s “commander-in-chief urged him forward, as follows, promised to support him, he would obey.”²² Thus, as Thornton’s line of argument follows, MacArthur consciously ignored the intelligence which his own command provided him, and which had detected and warned him of the Chinese military intervention, in order to align with the views and direct orders of his President. Although the CIA provided Truman with flawed interpretations of Chinese intentions in Korea, and MacArthur acquiesced to form war plans based on these assessments, it was not the only U.S. intelligence entity tasked with assessing the Korean situation.

In his 2015 book, *Intelligence Failure in Korea*, Major Justin M. Haynes places the ultimate blame for alleged U.S. intelligence failures surrounding the Chinese intervention in Korea with Major General Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur’s chief intelligence officer in the Far East Command (FEC). Haynes notes, “By November 7[,1950], many leaders in the field, at MacArthur’s headquarters in Japan, and in the halls of Washington understood that the People’s Liberation Army had committed substantial combat forces to the Korean Peninsula.”²³ Haynes continues, “Despite this knowledge, Willoughby did not determine that the [Chinese People’s Liberation Army] was preparing to execute a counteroffensive to defeat the UN advance into

²¹ Ibid; Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 180, accessed February 22, 2017,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

²² Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 359.

²³ Justin M. Haynes, *Intelligence Failure in Korea: Major General Charles A. Willoughby’s Role in the United Nations Command’s Defeat in November 1950* (United States: Pickle Publishing, 2015), Kindle Edition, Locations 252-4.

North Korea.”²⁴ The question of why such a senior intelligence officer would fail to reflect such commonly held knowledge in his intelligence assessments to MacArthur seems to find at least a potential answer in Thornton’s explanation. If one accepts the arguably most plausible portion Thornton’s argument-- that Truman directed MacArthur to evade acknowledgement of the presence of substantial Chinese combat forces in Korea in order to avoid the potential for a premature withdrawal of U.N. allied forces from the Korean theater-- it would follow that MacArthur ordered his subordinate, Willoughby, to deflate Chinese troop estimates and withhold any predictions for outright intervention accordingly.

In the book, Haynes provides detailed comparative analysis of intelligence assessments from the CIA and Willoughby’s FEC Intelligence Section (G2) during the months leading up to and following the Chinese intervention. In one such example, Haynes notes, “The CIA published a memorandum for President Truman on November 1, providing an estimate of Chinese capabilities and intent that mirrored Willoughby’s analysis at that time.”²⁵ This analysis from Haynes aligns with Thornton’s argument that on October 15, 1950 at Wake Island, Truman directed MacArthur to avoid acknowledging the presence major Chinese combat forces in Korea, effectively ordering MacArthur to ensure FEC G2 intelligence assessments reflected those from the CIA. Indeed, in one of Haynes’ focal arguments, the author asserts that, “Willoughby’s flawed assessment of Chinese intentions in the fall of 1950 was a result of rampant mirror imaging, complicated by circular analysis...”²⁶ To support this claim, Haynes asserts that during this period, “Analysis embedded in the CIA documents directly reflected the FEC G2’s reporting

²⁴ Ibid, 254-5.

²⁵ Justin M. Haynes, *Intelligence Failure in Korea: Major General Charles A. Willoughby’s Role in the United Nations Command’s Defeat in November 1950* (United States: Pickle Publishing, 2015), Kindle Edition, Locations 441-2.

²⁶ Ibid, Locations 46-7.

that refuted the possibility of Chinese entry into the war.”²⁷ Perhaps, in his efforts to prove Willoughby’s primary culpability in failing to predict Chinese intentions to intervene in Korea, Haynes overlooks the possibility that instead of the CIA documents reflecting those from the FEC G2, it was the inverse.

Given Thornton’s arguments, Truman’s directive to MacArthur would have necessitated that Willoughby adhere to the CIA view that the Chinese would not intervene in 1950 in his assessments. Further, evidence which Mitchell presents regarding AFSA SIGINT detection and warning of the impending Chinese intervention clearly underlines that U.S. intelligence provided prior warning of the Chinese intervention. Similarly, Thornton’s points regarding the prophetic War Plan SL-17, Operation Swarmer, U.S. intelligence discovery of the Soviet provision of T-34 tanks to North Korea, and an Army-wide emergency test the day before the North Korean invasion, all cumulatively argue that U.S. intelligence detected and warned policymakers of the imminent North Korean invasion. Despite systemic dysfunction and questionable decisions from policymakers, one can thus reasonably conclude that neither of these two major events of the early Korean War constituted U.S. “intelligence failures”.

While Thornton’s book offers a refreshing approach to the Korean War, challenging many consensus views long held by historians of the topic, and including perspectives from Stalin, Mao, and Kim Il Sung alongside those of Truman, it also highlights that even such a unique work ultimately proves U.S.-centric, and lacks consistent parallel comparisons between the pertinent nations. Other prominent works within the historiography, notably Goncharov et

²⁷ Ibid, Locations 334-5.

al.'s *Uncertain Partners*, wherein the authors focus on the strategic interrelations of Mao, Stalin, and Kim Il-Sung, center on the communist adversaries of the U.S., but lack relative comparisons. Beyond this and a few other exceptions, the vast majority of the historical texts on the Korean War appear to take an America-centric perspective, resulting in relatively less detailed discussions of the other nations involved in the conflict. Moreover, and more specific to this effort's theme and arguments, the topic's historiography lacks systematic comparative analyses of the war's most impactful nations' use of intelligence and the effectiveness thereof.

The process of determining whether allegations of U.S. "intelligence failures" prove credible when examined through the lenses of Thornton and other historians' arguments has helped to identify this comparative analysis gap within the topic's historiography. As the three primary U.S. adversaries in the Korean War, it seems logical to include North Korea, China, and Russia in such a comparative analysis, along with the U.S. itself.

Chapter 2 will focus on each of these four nations, assessing their respective use of intelligence within the context of the North Korean invasion of June 1950, while Chapter 3 will follow the same methodology using the Chinese military intervention of November 1950 as a baseline. Chapter 4 will assess each nation's overall strategic objectives and respective success in leveraging intelligence to achieve these goals. Individually and collectively, these analyses indicate that the U.S. proved more effective in conducting intelligence operations than its communist adversaries during both of these major events, as well as in achieving its overall strategic objectives for the war.

Chapter 2: The North Korean Invasion



Figure 1: Destroyed NKA T-34 outside Kimpo Airfield, September 17, 1950.¹

¹ “T-34 tank destroyed by 5th Marines on the road to Kimpo Airfield, 17 September 1950,” USMC Archives, accessed May 19, 2017, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Destroyed_T-34_Tank,_17_September_1950_\(15930053232\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Destroyed_T-34_Tank,_17_September_1950_(15930053232).jpg). In the weeks preceding the invasion, U.S. intelligence estimated that the North Koreans staged at least 65 of these tanks in the vicinity of the 38th parallel. Soviet data suggests that the NKA possessed as many as 258 of the T-34s. Either way U.S. and ROK forces suffered from a severe lack of countermeasures on hand in Korea at the onset of the invasion. For a discussion of these U.S. estimates and this lack of tank countermeasure equipment, see Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 109, 170-2; For a review of NKA tank numbers gleaned from a Soviet Army General Staff document of the period, see Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 147.

The invasion which the North Korean Army (NKA) conducted as it thrust south of the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950 stands as one of the most dramatic events in modern military history. Despite the apparent prevailing view among current Western historians that the invasion occurred without adequate detection or warning from U.S. intelligence entities and thus constituted a key “intelligence failure,” historians such as Thornton and Mitchell offer compelling evidence and logical arguments to the contrary. Further, the literature on the topic appears to lack parallel comparisons of U.S. intelligence efforts with those of its chief adversaries in the conflict—North Korea, China, and Russia. In attempt to fill that historiographical gap, the following will provide an individual analysis of each of these nation’s intelligence operations pertaining to the NKA invasion.

The historical evidence available as of the writing of this document does not portray North Korea and its Korean War-era leader, Kim Il Sung, favorably by any reasonable measure. In their book detailing the Stalin-Mao dynamic during the conflict, Goncharov et al. cite their interview with Yoo Sung Chul, a NKA general involved in the war planning for the invasion, in which Yoo explains, ““The Korean War was planned to last only a few days, so we did not plan anything in case things might go wrong.””² Further, Yoo explains that Soviet military advisers designed these war plans entirely, providing them to Kim Il Sung for his approval.³ This lack of contingency planning displays a conscious North Korean decision to ignore potential issues or threats to the invasion’s operational objectives, and thus a serious error in its intelligence

² Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155.

³ Ibid, 150.

preparation of the battlefield. As John Lewis Gaddis explains in *Strategies of Containment*, the U.S. was “...in a relatively favorable position to deal with the Korean crisis, since it had air, ground, and naval forces stationed close by” in occupied Japan, a fact which Kim and his NKA generals were undoubtedly fully aware, but for which they nonetheless planned no contingencies.⁴

In their 2012 *Arc of Empire*, Michael Hunt and Steven Levine point out that Kim’s overestimation of NKA capabilities and miscalculation that the U.S. would intervene with substantial troop commitments constitute serious judgement errors in the face of available information.⁵ The authors assert that prior to the southward attack, Kim “...concluded that the North Korean army could conquer the South in a matter of weeks. The risk of American intervention seemed slight.”⁶ Here, again, Kim and his military leaders failed to account for the nearby American occupation forces in Japan, which made the likelihood of U.S. intervention more feasible, while a U.S. military invasion of Korea made Kim’s prediction of a quick NKA victory equally unlikely. Kim’s miscalculations involving enemy troop strength and dispositions indicate ineffective use of intelligence information.

Goncharov and his fellow authors also note that NKA acquiescence to Soviet military plans and directives negatively impacted the NKA’s ability to relay strategic information on the battlefield and between units.⁷ In another interview, an NKA officer describes this situation as

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) Kindle Edition, 108.

⁵ Michael Hunt, and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 106, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=837883>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155.

NKA units first occupied Seoul, stating, “Communications between divisions, corps, and armies were disconnected. Each unit moved on its own, and each had its own plan.”⁸ Such a lack of vital communication capability brought on by poor planning undoubtedly greatly hindered North Korean intelligence collection and dissemination efforts between large combat units, representing yet another significant mismanagement of intelligence operations during the NKA invasion.

Throughout the topic’s historiography, the singular positive use of intelligence attributed to North Korea during the initial invasion appears to pertain to Kim’s independent decision to conduct the attack and capitalize on the element of surprise, leaving even his Chinese, though not his Soviet allies uninformed of his planned time of attack.⁹ As Gaddis explains in *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, “The invasion, when it came, caught [Mao] as well as the South Koreans and the Americans off guard.”¹⁰ Despite this nod to North Korean information security in maintaining operational secrecy, however, Gaddis goes on to explain that, “...then it was the turn of the North Koreans, the Soviets, and much of the rest of the world to be surprised by the swiftness and decisiveness with which the United States came to the assistance of South Korea.”¹¹ This point recalls the previously stated arguments regarding Kim and his military leadership’s overestimation of NKA capabilities and underestimation of the American military commitment to its South Korean ally. Even while successfully maintaining the element of surprise when initiating the invasion south of the 38th parallel, Kim and his leadership had badly misinterpreted the swiftness of American military deployment capabilities and general U.S.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

intentions in the event of a North Korean attack south. Arguably to a greater extent than any of the other three nations, North Korea mishandled its use of intelligence during this initial invasion in June 1950.

The involvement of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) he led during the initial NKA assault south is one best described as simultaneously indirect, yet untenably intertwined with Soviet and North Korean agendas. Alexander Pantsov and Steven I. Levine explain that as early as January 1950, under the urging of Stalin, Mao promised to help the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), "strengthen its defenses," despite that Stalin "said nothing to Mao about a possible invasion of South Korea."¹² The authors further note that on May 13, 1950, "...Mao again gave his full agreement to support the unification by military means," despite on only that same day having received a briefing from Kim on the NKA invasion plan.¹³ In fact, Mao made these commitments of military support to the NKA (though perhaps more accurately, to Stalin) despite Stalin's overt insistence that Kim keep the invasion plans from the "Chinese comrades."¹⁴ Mao's repeated commitments of Chinese military support to the DPRK, despite having no apparent concept of what type of circumstances such a commitment might entail, indicates a clear recklessness and disregard on the chairman's part. Such a request from Stalin, and by proxy, Kim, represents a clear instance which warranted the collection of relevant intelligence in order to make an informed decision on a matter with such

¹² Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 377.

¹³ *Ibid*, 379.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 377.

significant geopolitical implications. Mao's failure to do so constitutes a profound misjudgment in the use of intelligence involving the North Korean invasion.

Interviews of NKA officers which Goncharov and his co-authors conducted attest to the Russians and the North Koreans going to great lengths to keep their Chinese allies ignorant of specifics regarding the planned NKA offensive.¹⁵ As these historians note, "...a former senior North Korean supply officer vividly recalls that before the outbreak of the war, all Soviet weapons were transported to the DPRK by sea instead of by rail through Chinese territory for the specific purpose of denying the Chinese any hard intelligence about the North's preparations."¹⁶ Again, Mao's military commitments to his so-called allies, unwilling to even share information regarding weapons shipments, amount to a "blank check" for a mystery product. Stated less metaphorically, Mao promised an unspecified measure of military support for an undisclosed military operation. As intelligence involves the use of strategic information to gain advantage over one or more other nations, to include the protection and withholding of such information, it seems that in this specific scenario, Stalin and Kim effectively leveraged intelligence to their own advantage and to the detriment of Mao and the CCP.

In his 1994 *China's Road to the Korean War*, Jian Chen identifies three key factors which Mao and his fellow CCP leaders overlooked in their strategic calculus of American Far East policy, right up until the U.S. intervened following the NKA offensive in June 1950. First, Chen notes, "...the United States government had intimate ties with the Syngman Rhee [South Korean] government...South Korea's close connections with Japan made it less likely that the

¹⁵ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

United States would tolerate its destruction.”¹⁷ Second, “...the failure to maintain a non-Communist China caused severe criticism of the Truman administration at home...To President Truman, an appeasement policy towards the North Korean invasion could mean political suicide.”¹⁸ Third, and lastly, “The U.S. East Asian policy had quietly changed in early 1950. The CCP’s victory in China, together with the Soviet possession of the atomic bomb, changed the world balance of power...Consequently, [U.S. policymakers] believed that the U.S. should not allow further expansion of Soviet influence in any part of the world, including the Asian-Pacific area.”¹⁹ To so badly misread three such impactful factors suggests that CCP intelligence efforts lacked effective collection and analysis of intelligence regarding American diplomatic (South Korea and Japan), domestic political (homeland views of Truman’s failure to keep China free of communism), and national security issues (rise of the CCP and the Soviet nuclear state). Chen’s detailed, thoroughly researched, and logically supported arguments reflect the new Chinese regime’s relative naiveté concerning geopolitics in general and foreign intelligence operations specifically. However, in assessing the effectiveness of a nation’s intelligence operations, there is no sliding scale for inexperience or extra points for ideological zeal. Mao and the CCP neglected to prioritize their understanding of changing American policies and attitudes, and as a result, their expectations for little to no American reaction to the NKA invasion vanished as the reality of a decisive U.S. diplomatic and military response culminated within days of the attack. Underestimating the American reaction to this degree translates to a serious Chinese strategic

¹⁷ Jian Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 126, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=79596&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

error in leveraging available information to effectively inform the CCP's decisions surrounding the NKA invasion.

Extensive research within the relevant historical literature fails to yield a scholarly work which provides an example in which Mao's use of intelligence may be deemed reasonably laudable or worthy of positive characterization. As the unrivaled leader of the CCP and thus China, Mao's lack of access to, or deliberate abstention from, the use of traditional intelligence collected from foreign adversaries likely reflects general CCP attitudes towards intelligence operations at the time of the invasion in June 1950. Further, Chen's explanation of Mao and the CCP's three-point miscalculation regarding the American diplomatic and military commitment to South Korea and Japan, Truman's domestic political pressures stemming from Red China and the successful Soviet testing of a nuclear device, and the national security concerns over containing communist expansion point to a severely inexperienced, geopolitically naïve Communist China which failed to grasp key intelligence information within its sphere of international activity in June 1950. Finally, Mao's repeated promises to provide military support to the DPRK, despite Soviet and North Korean collaborative withholding of invasion war planning, reflects the chairman's lack of cognizance regarding the use of strategic intelligence information in international dealings.

Plainly stated, when one discusses Soviet Russia's intelligence efforts to pertaining to the NKA invasion of the Republic of Korea (ROK), one is effectively referring to whatever information Josef Stalin's preferred to receive during that period involving the Korean peninsula. As Christopher Andrew and Julie Elkner explain in their 2003 article, "The successes of Soviet intelligence collection during the early Cold War continued to be offset by Stalin's continued

role as his own chief intelligence analyst and the tailoring of intelligence reports to his own distorted view of the West.”²⁰ The authors continue, stating, “...in the spring of 1950,...Stalin made an...important error in concluding that the United States would not intervene if the North invaded the South...”²¹ Andrew and Elkner further describe how Stalin came to this conclusion “based on his misinterpretation of NSC-48...which excluded the Asian mainland from the U.S. defense perimeter,” and of which the U.S. failure “to intervene and prevent the Communist victory in China” provided further evidence.²² As a result of this misinterpretation, the authors assert, “Stalin was prepared for the first time to allow Kim Il-Sung to attack the South and begin the Korean War.”²³ Given the authors’ argument that Stalin permitted Kim to instigate the Korean conflict based on his own flawed interpretation of an American intelligence document, one must ascribe blame for the mistake to Stalin’s faulty logic, rather than to any lack of effort on the Great Comrade’s part.

Stalin also decided to allow the DPRK, which the Soviet Union provided with military weaponry, equipment, and embedded advisers, to invade the sovereign nation of the ROK based on this erroneous analysis of NSC-48, effectively greenlighting the outbreak of a war under the false assumption that the U.S. would not intervene. Accordingly, Stalin made a poorly calculated decision on the fundamental premise of an interpretative error. Stalin thus inarguably proved

²⁰ Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, “Stalin and Foreign Intelligence,” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, “Stalin and Foreign Intelligence,” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83-4., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

²³ Ibid, 84.

himself (and thus his nation) extraordinarily inept in the use of intelligence during the NKA invasion of the ROK.

Along this similar conceptual line, involving Stalin's interpretive mistakes in his intelligence analysis which directly produce other mistakes, Raymond L. Garthoff offers, "Neither the general hardening of Soviet policy nor Stalin's misjudgments in trying to blockade West Berlin in 1948 and unleashing the North Korean attack on South Korea in June 1950 rested on professional intelligence assessments. Their foundation instead was a set of distorted assumptions resulting from Stalin's application of an ideological lens in interpreting Western thinking and policy."²⁴ In this statement, Garthoff at least partially corroborates the claim from Andrew and Elkner that Stalin premised his decision to allow the DPRK to attack southward on a false assumption.²⁵ Such closely matching assertions within the historiography indicate credibility for this position, and calls Stalin's critical thinking skills in to serious question.

In a volume of his memoirs detailing his experiences at the Kremlin during the Cold War, Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor as premier of the U.S.S.R., recalls, "In assessing the successes and failures of Kim Il Sung, I think our advisers, when they planned this operation [of the DPRK invasion of the ROK], probably did not take everything into account...For this, of course, I think Stalin is to blame."²⁶ Here, similar to how Goncharov and his fellow authors describe NKA and Soviet war planners' failure to provide contingency directives beyond a few

²⁴ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*. Georgetown University Press, 2015), 14, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2192268>.

²⁵ Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, "Stalin and Foreign Intelligence," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

²⁶ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1990) 146.

days after the initial invasion, Khrushchev appears to claim that Stalin's failure to ensure that Soviet advisers provided NKA war planners with thorough combat guidance contributed to the DPRK defeat in the war.²⁷ By failing to provide comprehensive military guidance, as Khrushchev describes, Stalin set the NKA up for battlefield failure, and wasted vast sums in rubles by providing the DPRK with massive shipments of military supplies and equipment, most of which U.N. forces likely destroyed following their breakout from Pusan. By proving incapable of transferring invaluable combat tactics and strategy to NKA officers, these Russian military advisers, no doubt sent to North Korea on the express orders of Stalin, suggests poor communication of intelligence between allied nations during the first days of the conflict.

In a break with the theme of Stalin as a deeply flawed intelligence consumer, analyst, and director of collections, Thornton delivers a convincing argument regarding the Soviet leader's prowess as manipulative manager of the war's communist allies. Thornton states, "It was Stalin who, directly and through his representatives, determined the war plans—both the original plan to seize Seoul only, and the follow-on plan to seize Pusan; provided the weapons and supplies; trained the cadre; assigned commanders; and determined strategy and tactics, including the day the war would begin."²⁸ Thornton expounds his thoughts on Stalin, asserting, "Kim undoubtedly wanted to unify his country, but it was Stalin who decided whether, when, and how it would be attempted."²⁹ Thornton's list of these accomplishments of Stalin's entices one to believe in the premier's supreme use of intelligence to manage so many things. However, when one considers the mutually reinforcing arguments which Andrew and Elkin make in the article, and Garthoff

²⁷ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155.

²⁸ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 235.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

makes in his book, both claim that Stalin makes decisions based on distorted assumptions, including his election to permit Kim to attack South Korea.³⁰ Every single item in Thornton's list is a decision which Stalin made- this might indicate power, but it certainly does not necessitate that Stalin made any of those decisions based on sound reasoning. In fact, provided one accepts Andrew, Elkin, and Garthoff's argument that Stalin decided to approve Kim's long-anticipated request to attack and attempt to unify the ROK under the faulty interpretation of NSC-48 that the U.S. would not intervene in Asia, that makes at least one major item on that list less than impressive. Moreover, as one reads the list, most of those decisions end in either utter defeat of the North Koreans, or, at best, stalemate.

So, even when one makes a comprehensive list of all of the impactful decisions Stalin made independently during the initial invasion phase of the war, Stalin may prove powerful, but he proves anything but effective in his use of intelligence. As noted multiple times over to this point, Andrew, Elkin, and Garthoff combine to present a powerful argument that Stalin's decision to offer his approval to Kim for his reunification efforts on the Korean peninsula rested on the mistaken notion that the U.S. would not intervene. Further, Khrushchev places the blame on Stalin for poor communication of guidance for battlefield tactics and strategy from Soviet military advisers to NKA officers, as Stalin doubtless ordered the advisers to Korea prior to the commencement of the war. Stalin was undeniably powerful, but made flawed choices and manipulated accurate intelligence information to fit his ideological and personal preferences.

³⁰ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*. Georgetown University Press, 2015), 14, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2192268>; Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, "Stalin and Foreign Intelligence," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

Such an approach to intelligence left Stalin with distorted assumptions and lacking accurate information on which to base informed decisions during the NKA invasion in late June 1950.

As emphasized at multiple points previously in this paper, one need not overexert oneself in the search for historians' views which assert that the NKA invasion represents a U.S. intelligence failure due to both a lack of foreknowledge, as well as adequate warning of this offensive. In a 2016 book concentrating on the domestic political tensions President Truman faced before and during the Korean War, Larry Blomstedt argues that, in the period leading up to and in the early years of the Korean conflict, Senator Joseph "McCarthy's quest to root out communist subversion in the led to wholesale purges of Far Eastern experts of the State Department, robbing it of valuable expertise," and leading to the State Department's alleged failure to predict the North Korean invasion.³¹ While this purge no doubt led to a loss of valuable subject matter experts pertaining to this region, Blomstedt fails to provide direct evidence that how the loss of this group of personnel directly led to a failure to predict the DPRK invasion in June 1950.

In their 2008 book exploring the history of American intelligence, James B. Bruce and Roger Z. George seemingly nonchalantly state, "Spurring the evolution of intelligence analysis in the United States—and especially enhancing the CIA's role as America's premier all-source analytic agency—was the fallout from Communist North Korea's surprise invasion of South

³¹ Larry Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea: The Politics of America's First Undeclared War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 222, accessed February 6, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=985552&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Front_cover.

Korea in June 1950.”³² Perhaps the most notable point from this excerpt is that the authors refer to the “surprise invasion,” yet provide no citation or point of reference to support this perspective. This apparent scholarly acceptance of the DPRK invasion as taking U.S. intelligence off guard seems premature at best, especially given the persuasive points which Thornton makes arguing to the contrary.

In a 2013 book covering modern presidential commitments, Marvin Kalb states that, “According to his biographer, Robert J. Donovan, Truman was ‘shocked’ by the news, because, in his judgement, this was an ‘open military attack across an accepted international boundary upon an American-accepted government.’”³³ While Kalb at least cites another book, the credibility of this sources, along with Kalb’s analysis remain in question. Donovan, Truman’s biographer, may well accurately reflect Truman’s reaction to hearing of the invasion as “shocked,” but Donovan clearly articulates that Truman was shocked by the DPRK audacity to ignore international recognition of the 38th parallel, or that the ROK was a U.S. ally. Of note, Donovan did not state that Truman was “shocked” that the attack itself had occurred. Further, given the implications connected with the American President’s reaction to such news, the shock Truman displayed in his biographer’s might well have been a well-rehearsed reaction to the

³² James B. Bruce, and Roger Z. George, *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008) 23, accessed January 11, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=228437&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover; For another unsubstantiated assertion, see Richard P. Hallion, *The Naval Air War in Korea*. Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2011), 26, accessed January 7, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=420319&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_107.

³³ Marvin L. Kalb, *The Road to War: Presidential Commitments Honored and Betrayed* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013) 14, accessed March 14, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=577350&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_C1.

impending attack. As it were, Donovan's record of Truman's reaction mirrored the U.S. foreign policy reaction within the U.N. So, it would appear that this claim of Truman's surprise at the DPRK invasion more likely found its origins in the U.S. foreign policy stance, with the conscience of the United States "shocked" to see the DPRK invasion ignore international precedents—it seems reasonable to conclude that Donovan recorded the Truman administration's approach to the issue within the U.N., rather than the President's genuine alarm or surprise regarding the attack.

Similarly, in his 2005 *Why Secret Intelligence Fails*, Michael A. Turner matter-of-factly states, "The CIA failed to forecast the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950..." citing as evidence a table of CIA "successes and failures" produced by the author himself.³⁴ Obviously, that Turner references only his own subjective chart to support his claim that the NKA invasion constituted a U.S. intelligence failure, calls into question the credibility of his argument. Further, as one may recall from previous discussions, Mitchell explains that the AFSA detected and warned of the invasion, so Turner's reliance on only the CIA's performance in warning of the attack lacks thorough research and context.³⁵ In short, Turner's assertion that the CIA failed to adequately learn of and warn U.S. decision makers of the DPRK offensive does not necessitate that U.S. intelligence in general failed in this manner. In fact, Mitchell's evidence regarding AFSA SIGINT intercepts reveals that U.S. intelligence did, in fact, detect and provide warning of this offensive. Turner's sole reliance on CIA records offers yet another cautionary note that

³⁴ Michael A. Turner, *Why Secret Intelligence Fails* (Dulles, VA: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 22, 27, accessed March 5, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=388735&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover.

³⁵ Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 180-1, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

studying the CIA alone does not reflect the full context of the intelligence history surrounding the Korean conflict.

In another example of a historian basing his or her arguments solely on CIA records when asserting that the DPRK invasion represents a U.S. intelligence failure, Eric Dahl states bluntly that, “The attack by North Korea against South Korea on June 25, 1950, came as an utter shock to most American policymakers, military commanders, and intelligence agencies.”³⁶ Dahl claims that during the period immediately preceding the invasion, “...there was little concern about the threat from the clearly inferior North Korean military...” citing a CIA article as stating, ““No one in the US Government seemed worried about Korea.””³⁷ Time and again drawing from CIA reporting, Dahl appears to concur with Richard Mobley’s contention that “...the lack of clear, tactical indications of the North’s preparations for attack showed that the primary failure lay in terms of intelligence collection,” and Mobley’s statement that, ““Even had it been packaged differently, the key [U.S.] decision makers would have wanted more compelling evidence that an attack was imminent instead of just possible.””³⁸ However, as Kathryn Weathersby directly asserts, “...it had been obvious for at least a year that war would break out in Korea,” and the U.S. intelligence discovery of at least 65 T-34 tanks lent that argument very tangible and threatening evidence of an imminent attack.³⁹ Dahl’s near sole

³⁶ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 69, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³⁷ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 70, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives,” *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project* (November 1993), 5, accessed March 10, 2017,

reliance on CIA sources, and the U.S. intelligence discovery of T-34 tanks which refutes Dahl's position that the intelligence provided to U.S. officials did not adequately indicate an imminent threat of a North Korean invasion, combine to undermine Dahl's general assertion that the DPRK invasion served as an "utter shock" to most of America's policymakers and intelligence agencies. The true shock, it seems, is that historians continue to make such presumptive claims concerning the North Korean initial invasion, despite the substantial body of compelling evidence arguing to the contrary.

As Thornton so forcefully argues, formal acceptance of War Plan SL-17 (perhaps as much an intelligence assessment as a war plan), the U.S. intelligence discovery of large shipments of tanks from Russia to North Korea, a training exercise to combat a tank-led assault, and an Army-wide test the day before the actual North Korean invasion designed to prepare for an emergency all strongly suggest that U.S. intelligence detected and warned policymakers of the impending North Korean invasion, and that war planners were preparing accordingly on June 25, 1950. Despite that even Mitchell acknowledges that prior to U.S. troop deployment on the peninsula, "The Army Security Agency did pick up a couple of interesting developments—the Soviet listening post in Vladivostok was targeting South Korean communications and the Russians were sending large amounts of medical supplies to North Korea and Manchuria — but that was about it. It was all quiet on the communications front," Thornton and Weathersby's assertions strongly point to U.S. intelligence having detected and made decisionmakers aware of the imminent DPRK invasion.

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Working_Paper_8.pdf; Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 178.

While ultimately a subjective exercise, comparing these four nations' effectiveness in their respective use of intelligence surrounding the DPRK invasion into the ROK nonetheless offers evidence for logical conclusions and further debate. The least debatable portion of this comparison seems to lie in the notion that Kim Il Sung and his DPRK fared the worst in using information of strategic value to its advantage at this opening juncture of the conflict. Even in the one positive intelligence-based action attributed to North Korea relative to this invasion—that Kim achieved tactical surprise in deciding to attack on June 25, 1950—the NKA, along with the Soviets and the rest of the world, quickly learned that the true surprise lay in the swift, decisive American response, both militarily and diplomatically, in support of its South Korean allies.⁴⁰ This aspect, along with the DPRK acquiescence to Soviet military planning, command, and control in war plans which neglected to include contingencies for U.S. intervention or even plans beyond a few weeks, appears to leave North Korea as fourth most effective among this group in terms of intelligence use during the invasion.⁴¹ However, it seems that Mao and the Chinese found a way to set the bar even lower than the North Koreans regarding the mishandling of strategic information.

That Mao committed the CCP to provide an unquantified amount of military support towards an unspecified military endeavor (due mainly to North Korea and Soviet Russia withholding war plans for the invasion of South Korea from him, but also due to Mao's negligence in conducting intelligence operations to fill these informational gaps) constitutes

⁴⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75.

⁴¹ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155, 150.

perhaps the most significant strategic blunder and woeful ignorance of intelligence of the war, let alone the initial invasion.⁴² Committing so blindly fundamentally contradicts any reasonable definition of the effective use of intelligence, and thus, the Chinese actually seem to claim fourth, while the North Koreans rank third in their effective leveraging of intelligence in decisions surrounding the DPRK invasion.

With the final comparison remaining between the U.S. and Soviet Russia regarding which country more effectively used intelligence in its role during the initial NKA invasion, the most important factor seems to involve under what basic premise each nation operated its intelligence apparatus during this period. As Andrew and Elkin in their article, and Garthoff in his book, explain, Stalin based his strategic decisions of the era on distorted assumptions of the West, rather than on professional intelligence assumptions.⁴³ On the other hand, even at its alleged worst, U.S intelligence proved wanting in not providing policymakers with “...more compelling evidence that an attack was imminent instead of just possible.”⁴⁴ When it comes down to deciding which was more effective, Stalin’s delusions or more compelling evidence of the imminence versus the potential for an attack, it seems more than reasonable that the latter proves superior.

⁴² Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 377; Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155.

⁴³ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*. Georgetown University Press, 2015), 14, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2192268>; Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, “Stalin and Foreign Intelligence,” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

⁴⁴ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 69, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

So, in using available, relevant evidence within Korean War historiography to conduct a comparative analysis of these four nations' effectiveness using intelligence in their respective roles surrounding the initial North Korean invasion, U.S. intelligence clearly proves the most effective. This conclusion, coupled with a separate, though equally compelling set of arguments from Thornton contending against U.S. "intelligence failures" involving this DPRK offensive, indicate that the U.S. committed no such "intelligence failures," and actually proved more effective using intelligence than its three primary adversaries.

Chapter 3: The Chinese Intervention



Figure 2: U.S. Marines Guarding Chinese POWs, Koto-Ri, December 9, 1950¹

¹ F.C. Kerr, “Chinese communist troops, wearing tennis sneakers, rags and American footgear, surrender to Charley Company, 7th Marines, south of Koto-ri, December 9, 1950,” Department of Defense Media, accessed May 19, 2017, http://www.dodmedia.osd.mil/DVIC_View/Still_Details.cfm?SDAN=HMSN9806779&JPGPath=/Assets/Still/1998/Marines/HM-SN-98-06779.JPG. PLA troops moved into North Korea beginning in the last half of October, with the large-scale military intervention fully developing by the end of November 1950. The Truman administration made no public acknowledgement of a major China troop presence in Korea until November 10, 1950 through a resolution submitted at a U.N. Security Council meeting. For NSC 81/2, in which the Truman administration overtly acknowledges the Chinese intervention, see “United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea, November 14, 1950, (NSC 81/2)” The President Harry S. Truman Library, accessed May 28, 2017, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/ci-3-5.pdf

One of the most notable implications of the November 1950 Chinese military intervention into the Korean War was that it brought three of this project's four featured nations into direct involvement in the conflict, with the remaining nation, Stalin's Soviet Russia, deeply influential upon, if not essentially issuing orders to, Kim and Mao. As a result, the use of intelligence from all these nations' perspectives took on perhaps an even broader role than that of the initial DPRK invasion, and thus ample evidence appears to exist which can facilitate a relevant comparative analysis, using the methodology as reflected in Chapter 2.

Beyond the admirable historical analysis and conclusions which Goncharov and his fellow authors present in their 1993 *Uncertain Partners*, the authors also include in the book an appendix with full translated texts of dozens of cables between Mao, Stalin, and Kim and their respective government representatives. These translations of primary sources provide invaluable insight into the interrelations between this trio of allied communist nations as the events surrounding the Chinese military intervention in Korea unfolded. These cables, directives, transcripts of speeches, etc., allow English language access into some of these leaders' thought processes, policymaking, and even war strategies, within which the use of intelligence plays an obvious and crucial role. The Wilson Center Digital archive also provides original scans of these documents, along with translations and brief context. Such resources provide a surprisingly clear picture of the inner workings of Korean War era China, Russia, and North Korea, and indicate these nations' relative dysfunction relative to the United States in terms of their collective and individual application of intelligence in key wartime decisions.

Historians appear to largely concur, and the available primary evidence seems to likewise reflect, that Kim Il Sung and the DPRK leadership ultimately surrendered the making of war

strategy decisions and their implementation to Soviet (Stalin's) control, and that as early as January 1950, Stalin's plans included Chinese military intervention in the event that U.S. involvement in the war necessitated such reinforcements.² Moreover, as the primary evidence suggests, Kim and the DPRK leaders initiated the war with their June 25, 1950 invasion across the 38th parallel despite lacking any clear indication from Mao or Stalin of when, how, or to what extent the Chinese would enter the war, nor any specifics regarding how the Soviets would support these efforts.³ With such glaring holes in the DPRK's intelligence picture of the battlefield, even given that the Chinese and Soviets were supposed communist comrades-in-arms, allowing one foreign power to dictate war policy (Russia), and another to bring an entire army onto Korean soil (China) without a clear understanding of military commitments within the alliance, seems to constitute a serious lapse in DPRK judgement, with grave stakes involving obvious military, diplomatic, and international relations, and domestic security implications.

Goncharov et al. note that in an October 14, 1950 cable from Mao's premier, Zhou Enlai, to Stalin, Zhou "...sought Stalin's advice on how to coordinate the combat operations of the Chinese and [North] Korean forces."⁴ The significance here is not only that Chinese and NKA forces lacked a formalized plan for military coordination, but at this late date—mid-October 1950, the North Koreans had not even begun to plan for coordination with the Chinese. Amazingly, nearly four months into the war, Kim and his NKA generals had to that point failed to even address the issue of NKA coordination with the Chinese military. Further, as Goncharov

² Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 377.

³ *Ibid.*, 377, 379.

⁴ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 195.

and his fellow authors point out, when the issue finally received attention, it was the Chinese, not the DPRK leadership, who asked Stalin for advice on how best to coordinate operations of the two armies. Kim and his generals disregarded the value of such vital wartime information, and this lapse in elementary military preparation appears to represent an important DPRK intelligence failure.

When one examines this cable from Zhou to Stalin, Zhou's choice of wording only strengthens this concept. In an English translation of the document, Zhou states, "The Chinese People's Liberation Army will enter North Korea for military operations as volunteers. When it undertakes military operations in cooperation with the North Korean People's Army, how should [the question of] the mutual command relationship be decided?"⁵ Here, Zhou begins by matter-of-factly stating that the Chinese People's Liberation Army [PLA] will enter North Korean sovereign territory for military operations—this clearly indicates that Kim has provided the Chinese with prior approval of this action, as a foreign army entering another nation's sovereign territory without the permission of that nation constitutes an obvious act of war. Zhou then asks Stalin how the mutual command relationship between the NKA and PLA should be decided, indicating that no party within the three communist nations had addressed this issue prior to this cable. Thus, Kim agreed to the PLA entering his nation before even addressing how the command structure would be formed, which essentially means that during an ongoing state of war, two separate armies, speaking different languages and serving two distinct governments,

⁵ "Letter from Zhou Enlai to Stalin," October 14, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office) and Zhongyang dang'anguan (Central Archives), eds., *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao (Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC)*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 404-405, trans. Jingxia Yang and Douglas Stiffler, accessed February 17, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114216>.

would not know who, or what government was in charge. Failing to even acknowledge that a coordination plan between the NKA and PLA was undeniably crucial to combat effectiveness exhibits a blatant disregard for information of intelligence value on the part of the DPRK leadership.

Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue explain that even after Zhou opened discussions between the three communist nations in mid-October 1950 regarding the need for a joint NKA-PLA command structure in Korea, the DPRK leadership did not formalize this coordination until December 3, 1950, some six weeks later, and during an ongoing war.⁶ By that point, the Korean War had been raging for nearly half a year. Further, when the North Koreans finally did establish a joint command structure with the PLA, they ceded the command to a Chinese general, Peng Dehuai, despite Mao's assurance to DPRK delegates that "we leave this matter in your hands."⁷ The DPRK leadership's decision to allow a foreign general to command its troops meant that NKA military intelligence answered to a foreign national, and thus that the DPRK failed to protect its intelligence. As the reader may recall, Bimfort's definition of intelligence includes the protection of intelligence, and Peng's appointment as commander of joint NKA-PLA forces in Korea meant that DPRK leadership failed to protect its intelligence from a foreign power, even if one considers China a loyal North Korean ally.

Although it would likely provide a more complex and intriguing study if evidence existed which might point to at least a few examples of DPRK competency in its use of intelligence in decisions related to the Chinese military intervention, no such evidence appears to exist. As the

⁶ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 198, 345-6.

⁷ Ibid.

primary sources and secondary analysis cited above attest, Kim and the DPRK leadership not only failed to address the basic requisite for a coordination plan between the NKA and PLA forces, but acquiesced to the placement of a Chinese general as commander of the joint effort, and, in turn, failing to protect DPRK intelligence from foreign powers—allied or not. While one may argue that the DPRK leadership had little choice but to follow directives from their Soviet and Chinese “allies,” as Pantsov and Levine posit that, “Kim needed Mao’s help...” and, “It was impossible [for Kim] to disobey Stalin...,” Kim and his lieutenants could have established a command coordination plan as early as January 1950 and appointed an NKA general as joint command and nonetheless maintained compliance Chinese and Soviet demands.⁸ Further, in assessing the effectiveness of the DPRK’s use of intelligence in decisions surrounding the Chinese military intervention, explanations of coercion from external forces hold no bearing. Only how effectively Kim and the DPRK leadership utilized and protected intelligence involving the Chinese intervention may be assessed, and the historical record seems to persuasively indicate that they failed profoundly.

Given that the Chinese military intervention in the Korean War inherently pertains most directly to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), it would seem a reasonable prediction that the amount and type scholarly materials available relevant to the CCP leadership’s use of intelligence in deciding to intervene is overwhelmingly substantial. Indeed, historians now have access to many pertinent primary documents, and seemingly countless texts on the general topic of the Chinese intervention exist. However, within the relatively narrow scope of Mao and other

⁸ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 378.

CCP leadership's use of intelligence, the quantity and breadth of sources likewise narrows, with a select group of these sources standing out as the most compelling evidence. These sources reveal a generally flawed approach to and the use of intelligence within the Chinese regime's leadership, with Mao deeply influenced by Stalin, but undeniably holding the final word on China's military decisions.

In the appendix of *Uncertain Partners*, Goncharov et al. provide an English translation of an October 14, 1950 cable from Mao to his premier, Zhou Enlai, which outlines Mao's arguments for entering the war. In this consequential correspondence, Mao states, "If we do not send troops [to Korea], the reactionaries at home and abroad will be swollen with arrogance when the enemy troops press to the Yalu River border. Consequently, it will be...unfavorable to Northeast China. [In such a situation], the entire Northeast Frontier Force will be tied down and the power supplies in South Manchuria will be controlled [by hostile parties]."⁹ Here, Mao alludes to his assessment that U.S. forces intended to invade Manchuria after pushing through North Korea. This assessment from Mao reflects another primary document which Goncharov and his fellow authors examine, an official report from Zhou on "Mao's assessment of the ultimate aim of the American military operations in North Korea."¹⁰ In the report, Zhou states, "Our intelligence is that [the Americans] planned first to cross the 38th parallel without provoking China and then to direct their spearhead at China."¹¹ As these authors argue and the primary source evidence sources reflect, "Convinced by intelligence assessments, ideology, a history of conflict, and the statements of some U.S. commanders that the UN juggernaut would

⁹ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 282.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

not halt at the Yalu, Mao believed that a confrontation with the United States was inescapable, and that it would be better to enter the war before Kim Il Sung retreated into China with his government in exile.”¹² With all of this evidence persuasively indicating that Mao and the CCP leadership based their decision to intervene in Korea at least partially on Chinese intelligence assessments, what remains to determine is whether PRC intelligence accurately assessed American military intentions to invade China.

The most direct and clear evidence of American intentions in the Korean War are laid out in NSC 81/1, a top secret U.S. National Security Council intelligence assessment and analysis of potential courses of action pertaining to the conflict as of its date of publication, September 9, 1950. The conflict was nearly three months in duration at that juncture, and less than a week following the publication of NSC 81/1, MacArthur conducted the Inchon landing on September 15. This moment was also a little over one month prior to Mao’s final decision to send PLA troops into Korea, and it seems that it was at this time and through this particular document that one might best determine whether American intentions in its prosecution of the war included an invasion of China. Moreover, with its top secret classification level, it seems safe to assume that the analysis and possible courses of action presented in the document are genuine and void of any inhibitions that foreign powers might learn of them.

Paragraph 18 of the “Conclusions” section of NSC 81/1 states begins with, “In the event of the open or covert employment of major Communist Chinese forces south of the 38th parallel:”, continues with “a. The United States should not permit itself to become engaged in general war with Communist China,” and adds “b. As long as action by U.N. military forces

¹² Ibid., 194.

offers a reasonable chance of successful resistance, the U.N. commander should continue such action and be authorized to take appropriate air and naval action outside Korea against Communist China.”¹³ The first note here is that the document clearly establishes that such action is contingent upon not only the deployment of “major” PLA forces, but these forces conduct operations south of the 38th parallel. So, without this important development south of the established north-south international boundary, the U.S. harbored no intentions of even engaging PLA forces, let alone invading Manchuria.

Second, before detailing how the U.N. commander should prosecute the war in the event of major PLA forces operating south of the 38th parallel, the document plainly states that the U.S. should not engage in general war with China, a situation which would undoubtedly exist should the U.S. invade China. Lastly, although NSC 81/1 states that the U.N. commander should be afforded authorization to conduct naval and air strikes “outside of Korea”, the conspicuous omission of land-based attacks indicates that no ground invasion of any nation—to include, of course, China—should receive authorization. Given all of these points, gleaned from the document which likely presents the most candid portrayal of American intentions in its participation in the Korean conflict, it cannot be reasonably argued that the U.S. intended to invade the PRC at the time of the Chinese intervention. Thus, Mao’s assessment that the U.S. intended to invade his nation, which informed his subsequent decision to send PLA troops into Korea, appears to represent a deeply flawed Chinese use of intelligence in making such a consequential wartime decision.

¹³ “National Security Council Report, NSC 81/1, ‘United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea’,” September 09, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Truman Presidential Museum and Library, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116194>.

This conclusion regarding Mao and the CCP leadership's misinterpretation of intelligence falls in line with the views of a renowned scholar with the historiography of the Korean War, Michael Sheng. In a 2014 article, Sheng breaks down the evolution of the historiography pertaining to the conflict, while also offering a revisionist approach to the subject matter, particularly surrounding Mao. Sheng explains, "For analytical purposes, the existing scholarship may be divided into two schools of interpretation, one that emphasizes 'national interest' and one that emphasizes 'ideology.'"¹⁴ Within the national interest school, some scholars such as Allen S. Whiting, Sheng asserts, "have portrayed Mao Zedong as a reluctant participant in the Korean War," while others such as Goncharov et al. and Weathersby "further argue that Mao was somehow manipulated or forced to send troops by the fait accompli presented by Stalin and Kim Il-sung..."¹⁵ Still others, notably Thornton, "even speculate that, in order to prevent Mao from becoming the 'Tito of the East...', Stalin created the crisis at China's doorstep to draw Beijing into a conflict with the United States."¹⁶ Even if one accepts any, part, or all of these national interest perspectives, these arguments fail to excuse the CCP chairman's decision to enter the war based on flawed interpretations of intelligence concluding that the U.S. aimed to invade mainland China via the Korean peninsula. Regardless of his own indifference, or external manipulation from the Soviets and North Koreans, Mao made the decision to send PLA troops to Korea based on poor predictive intelligence analysis, and thus he and his fellow Chinese communist leaders should bare the culpability without caveat.

¹⁴ Michael Sheng, "Mao's Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision," *Twentieth Century China* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 269, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1521538514Z.00000000048>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

As an explanation of the “ideology” approach to Mao’s role in the Korean War, Sheng offers that scholars representing views of this school, “While acknowledging Mao’s reluctance to intervene, they emphasize the inner logic of Mao’s ‘continuing revolution,’ including communist internationalist ideology and national security concerns.”¹⁷ Sheng continues with his explanation of historians who take an “ideology” approach to Mao, stating, “Beijing, they argue, viewed China’s national interest via a Leninist prism, which led Mao and his associates in Moscow and Pyongyang to believe that war with the US imperialists was inevitable.”¹⁸ Similar to the national interest approach, the ideology approach attempts to define Mao’s motivations for entering the war, and while communist ideology may have heavily influenced Mao and CCP leadership in this decision, it is just that—ideology, not intelligence. It appears that in allowing ideological communist dogma to skew their analysis of American intentions in east Asia, the CCP, and especially Mao, confused theory with fact-based estimates. Effective use of intelligence, of course, may include the former, but when it involves entering into a major regional war against the most powerful military on earth at the time, the decision to do so must reflect the latter. As Gaddis puts it, “...ideology distorted reality. Mao, from 1946 on, was so convinced of the Americans’ ill will, he ‘tilted’ toward Moscow to protect his revolution from a plot to throttle it that never existed.”¹⁹ Such arguments from the ideology school reveal that Mao allowed ideology to trump reality, a scenario wherein Mao forced the fate of the PLA troops he dispatched to Korea to rely on “ideological euphoria—a conviction that the forces of history was on [the communist forces’] side—” rather than on viable intelligence.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 269.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83.

²⁰ Ibid.

Telegrams between Mao and his subordinates in the period immediately prior to Mao's mid-October 1950 decision to intervene in Korea reveal that Mao did not come to this decision for lack of detailed intelligence regarding U.N. troop strength, positions, and movement. In a telegram from Mao to Zhou on October 14, Mao details such intelligence involving U.S., ROK, and British units throughout the Korean peninsula, and their relative strength relative to NKA forces.²¹ Mao also includes a battlefield assessment from General Peng that, "...if [the Chinese communist] army can dispatch one corps to the mountainous areas in Tokchon County about 200 kilometers northeast of Pyongyang and deploy three other corps and three artillery divisions to the Huichon-Chonchon-Kanggye area north of Tokchon," the PLA forces might halt a U.S. advance on Pyongyang, "gain time to become well equipped and trained," and "annihilate" ROK "puppet" units advancing north from Wonsan.²² With such a clear intelligence picture of the battlefield, reflecting a CCP understanding of both adversarial and friendly forces, as well as potential outcomes from PLA troop deployments, it would prove difficult to argue that Mao and his leadership associates chose to enter the war on the basis of a general lack of, or deficiently detailed, intelligence on the battlefield situation.

Yet, Mitchell argues that, "Because of their different language and appearance, as well as a lack of technology, the Chinese apparently did not make a major intelligence effort. Confident in their military philosophy and cultural superiority, the Chinese concentrated on hammering at the enemy, while largely ignoring the mass of American radio transmissions."²³ Despite

²¹ "Doc. 75. Mao Telegram to Zhou Enlai in Moscow re the Current Status of the War, Oct. 14, 1950, 0300," in Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 283.

²² Ibid.

²³ Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), p#, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

Mitchell's contention that the Chinese placed little emphasis on the collection or use of intelligence throughout the Korean War, evidence from primary sources such as the October 14 telegram from Mao to Zhou indicate that at a strategic level, the CCP leadership both valued and enjoyed ready access to accurate intelligence. The key delineation between Mitchell's assertions and those revealed in the primary documents, it seems, lies in the Chinese valuation on such information at the strategic versus the tactical level. While the PLA battlefield units might well have largely dismissed the use of intelligence at the tactical level where the actual fighting occurred, the communications between Mao and his close leadership associates such as Premier Zhou and General Peng suggest that the CCP leadership incorporated intelligence from the Korean combat theater, at least that pertaining to units of division-level or higher, in their ongoing strategy for the war. Moreover, given that these telegrams show that Mao and such CCP leaders had access to this type of intelligence, Chinese intelligence must have conducted ongoing intelligence collection efforts at the division level or higher.

As the intercommunications between the CCP leadership reveal, Mao's decision to intervene in Korea did not result from a lack in collection, accuracy, or CCP leadership valuation of available intelligence. In other words, the decision to intervene was not based on flawed intelligence collection or dissemination, at either the tactical or strategic level. Rather, it seems, Mao chose to send PLA forces across the Yalu River as a result of the chairman's ideologically-influenced, flawed interpretation of available intelligence regarding U.S. strategic intentions in east Asia.

An examination of available historical documents forcefully indicates that Mao's decision to intervene militarily in Korea represents a significant Chinese intelligence failure, and that Mao bares the ultimate culpability for this mistake. Mao's own communications to Peng and Zhou reveal that the chairman interpreted available intelligence as evidence of American strategic intentions to invade China via the Korean peninsula. This conclusion from Mao proves readily discredited when one considers that NSC 81/1, published only weeks before Mao's final commitment to intervention and outlining U.S. strategy for Korea, overtly forbids the U.N. commander from engaging in "major" war with Communist China, and implicitly excludes the use of ground forces outside of Korea—to include, of course, China—directly refutes any notion that the U.S. aimed to invade China. Further, Mao's October 14, 1950 telegram to Peng, sent just days before Mao ordered troops to Korea, shows that the Chinese leadership maintained an accurate intelligence picture of the Korean theater, detailing both adversarial and NKA unit activity across the peninsula, and thus that one cannot explain Mao's faulty interpretation of U.S. intentions on a lack of available intelligence. To the contrary, it appears that despite possessing a reasonably accurate intelligence picture of the battlefield, Mao's proscription to Leninist ideology, or even aspirations to present himself as the "Lenin of the East," as Sheng argues, heavily influenced his calculus of American intentions and skewed his analysis of strategic intelligence.²⁴ This flawed analysis directly informed Mao's decision to deploy PLA forces to Korea, and engage in a conflict wherein nearly a million of his Chinese countrymen would perish

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²⁴ ²⁴ Michael Sheng, "Mao's Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision," *Twentieth Century China* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 271, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1521538514Z.00000000048>.

The Soviet role in the Chinese military intervention in October and November of 1950 aligns with the part Russia played throughout the conflict—one of direction, support, and manipulation. In all of these facets of the Russia's involvement, of course, Stalin proved the most influential and often deciding factor, as the Soviet leader maintained ultimate control over not only his own nation's wartime activities, but his communist North Korean and Chinese allies as well. As the reader may recall, Andrew and Elkner assert that despite a very capable Soviet foreign intelligence apparatus during the Cold War, Stalin's self-imposed role as chief Russian intelligence analyst, his tendency to slant the intelligence he received to fit his own "distorted view of the West," often undermined sound decision making within the Soviet government.²⁵ Moreover, the fear Stalin inspired amongst even his own intelligence agencies led some Russian intelligence personnel to withhold information which might conflict with the dictator's preconceived notions, undoubtedly crippling Soviet intelligence dissemination capability.²⁶ Perhaps even more significantly, such omissions of information surrounding national security issues doubtless skewed Stalin's understanding of reality, even as he made every major decision pertaining to Russia, including its involvement in China's troop deployment into Korea.

According to Bimfort, intelligence includes the protection and assurance of non-disclosure of national security information, a discipline to which Stalin appears to have adhered in his relations with his Korean War communist allies, and especially when communicating with Kim and Mao directly about the Chinese intervention. Pantsov and Levine provide a chronological account of how Stalin manipulated his fellow communist leaders through his

²⁵ Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, "Stalin and Foreign Intelligence," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

²⁶ Ibid.

calculated control of information pertaining to the Chinese military support of the DPRK. Pantsov and Levine state that in Mao's initial commitments of Chinese support to North Korea, which he declared on two separate occasions—first in January, then in May 1950—“Just like Kim Il Sung...Mao miscalculated. Stalin alone came out a winner.”²⁷ As the authors explain, although Kim initiated the war through the NKA invasion, and Mao “had unequivocally promised his neighbors [North Korea] help...,” as early as the summer of 1949, Stalin's dominant position of power among the three communist leaders allowed him to dictate much of the flow of information within the alliance, apparently leaving Mao and Kim dependent on him for informed guidance.²⁸ Stalin's careful control over when, how, and to what extent he released information to these allies regarding the communist alliance's military plans indicates a potential example of a highly effective use of intelligence.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Stalin managed to receive Mao's commitment of military support to the DPRK, despite no indication from the Soviet leader as to what circumstances this support might be required. Having secured this support, in late March, the diary of the Soviet ambassador to China reveals that Stalin informed Kim that in “...the case of emergency, the [Chinese] will send troops,” and gave the DPRK his de facto blessing to invade the south, provided the North Koreans conducted “considerable preparation.”²⁹ Stalin, as we shall see, disingenuously informed Kim, “We must be absolutely certain that Washington will not get involved in the fight.”³⁰ Another translation of a primary source document shows that it was not

²⁷ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 379.

²⁸ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 379.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 377.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

until mid-May that Stalin informed Mao, via telegram, of his prior meeting with Kim, and of the Soviet contingent approval for a DPRK military incursion into the south.³¹ Stalin added that, “In this regard a qualification was made, that the question [of whether the NKA should invade the ROK] should be decided finally by the Chinese and Korean comrades together...”³² Stalin made no mention to Mao of the cautionary caveat regarding American involvement in the war, as he had with Kim. To this point in mid-May 1950, one might argue that Stalin had deviously manipulated his two supposed allies, capitalizing on Kim’s eagerness to reunify Korea, and obtained Mao’s uninformed, seemingly unqualified commitment to provide the DPRK with military support. Telling Kim to beware American entry into the war, while remaining silent on this matter in his correspondence with Mao, and leaving the decision for war up to Mao and Kim under the pretense of a genuinely cooperative alliance, Stalin appears to have set the stage for what Pantsov and Levine argue were “...Stalin’s true geopolitical intentions. For the sake of world revolution he was ready to provoke World War III.”³³ However, Stalin proved either unaware or dismissive of other critical developments which emerged as a result of this scheming.

Unbeknownst to Stalin, or perhaps known, yet perceived as an unproblematic issue to the Soviet leader, prior to Stalin acknowledging it, Mao was not only aware of the meeting between Stalin and Kim in March 1950, but had “...long since understood Stalin’s intentions to start a war in Korea, but he still resented Stalin’s failure to level with him in January.”³⁴ Contrary to his promise to Stalin “...to not reveal the [invasion] plan...whether to the ‘Chinese comrades’ or even to the other North Korean leaders,” immediately following the March meeting, Kim

³¹ Ibid., 378.

³² Ibid.

³³ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 383.

³⁴ Ibid., 379.

dispatched emissaries to Beijing in order to inform the CCP leadership of the planned invasion.³⁵ In his attempts to manipulate his so-called allies through his selective release of information, Stalin apparently failed to account for their own potential duplicitous actions. Kim's dispatch of North Korean emissaries to China thwarted Stalin's intended objective to withhold from Mao the Soviet-DPRK plans for an invasion constitutes a Russian failure to protect secret, strategic-level intelligence information from a foreign power. Further, it seems that Stalin failed to apply a basic cost-benefit calculus to the potential outcomes of this policy of secrecy within the alliance. Mao resented his exclusion from such consequential invasion plans, undoubtedly influencing the chairman's October 2 message to Stalin in which Mao announced that China would "refrain from advancing troops" into Korea. In combination with his growing realization that U.S. forces might prove a devastating adversary in Korea, the resentment Mao harbored regarding Stalin's lack of transparency no doubt influenced his postponement of troop deployment.

Additionally, it seems reasonable to assume that Kim realized, given Stalin's obvious record of secrecy towards Mao, that Stalin likely would, if he had not already, keep similarly impactful information from Kim. The resulting mistrust within the communist alliance jeopardized the implementation of Stalin's strategy which relied pivotally upon Chinese forces to confront and halt the American advance northward. At the root of this miscalculation is Stalin's failure to effectively apply predictive analysis to realistic, hypothetical scenarios to his decision to maintain secrets from his allies. In short, Stalin failed to both protect this secret, as well as to consider the implications to his war plans should Mao discover this secret.

³⁵ Ibid., 378.

Mao's October 2, 1950 proposal to postpone PLA troop deployment to Korea prompted a coded telegram response from Stalin which receives considerable attention within the historiography due to Stalin's theretofore unseen candidness with Mao regarding the situation in Korea.³⁶ In the telegram, Stalin states, "Of course I took into account...[the possibility] that the USA, despite its unreadiness for a big war,...which, in turn, would drag China into the war, and along with this draw into the war the USSR. Should we fear this? In my opinion, we should not, because together we will be stronger than the USA and England..."³⁷ Stalin goes on to assert that, "If a war is inevitable, let it be waged now, and not in a few years when Japanese militarism will be restored as an ally of the USA and when the USA and Japan will have a ready-made bridgehead on the continent in a form of the entire Korea run by [ROK leader] Syngman Rhee."³⁸ While historians differ in their interpretations of this telegram along "national interest" and "ideology" lines, what is clear is that Stalin "now bluntly explained that an open clash between China and America was precisely what he was aiming for."³⁹ That Stalin only at this late stage in the war, weeks after MacArthur's September 15, 1950 landing at Inchon and over five months after the initial NKA invasion, attests to a lack of crucial communication between Stalin and Mao regarding the most basic, foundational reasons for Stalin's involvement in the war.

³⁶ For examples of historians' referencing this telegram, see, for example, Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 383; Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 339; and John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79.

³⁷ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 383.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 382.

Moreover, Stalin clearly articulates his continued paranoia pertaining to a Japanese military threat to Soviet Russia and China, a fear which ignored or lacked the intelligence insight into the severe restrictions on Japanese military capabilities which the U.S. implemented following WWII. Stalin's lack of communication with Mao regarding such a basic motivation and strategic understanding for the Sino-Soviet alliance for propagating a war in Korea—that the U.S. would intervene—represents a lack of crucial intelligence sharing on the part of the Soviets, especially given the heavy military burden Stalin placed on the Chinese. And Stalin's expressed fear of a continued Japanese military threat displays either a lack of Soviet intelligence regarding the U.S. restrictions on Japanese military capabilities in the aftermath of WWII, or poor analysis of available analysis thereof. When one considers that this October 2, 1950 telegram from Stalin represents a rare glimpse of the Soviet leader's candid views regarding the conflict in Korea, and that the message outlines Stalin's general motivations for both the Soviets and Chinese entering the war, these intelligence failures take on a remarkably profound context.

Stalin's use of secrecy amongst the communist alliance engaged in the Korean War proved an ineffective use of information of intelligence value, first, as Stalin not only failed to keep these secrets, as evidenced in the example of Mao learning of the secret meeting in March 1950 between Stalin and Kim wherein Stalin greenlit the NKA invasion. Second, in keeping secrets from Mao, Stalin doubtless fostered Mao's resentment for excluding the chairman from decisions which involved Chinese military commitments, and likely left Kim wondering what information Stalin had already withheld or would withhold from him. The resulting mistrust could not have outweighed the potential benefits of leaving Mao or Kim in the dark on communist plans in Korea. This leads to the third conclusion on Stalin's use of intelligence involving the Chinese intervention: it was not only ultimately ineffective, but likely unnecessary

for Stalin to withhold plans for the NKA invasion from Mao. Although Mao wavered in early October 1950 in his commitment to send troops to Korea, he had also clearly expressed that he believed the Americans' true intentions for their involvement in Korea was to use the peninsula as a base of invasion into China.⁴⁰ Mao may have held out in the hopes of securing Stalin's commitment of air support to PLA operations in Korea, but Mao's prior promises to send troops and his fear of American invasion strongly suggest that he planned to send troops to the peninsula regardless of this air cover.⁴¹

Fourth, and lastly, Stalin's fear of a Japanese military threat points to either a lack of intelligence, or poor analysis of available intelligence regarding the severe restrictions imposed on the Japanese military following WWII. Along with his belief, which Mao shared, that the U.S. intended to invade mainland Asia via Korea, Stalin's unrealistic assessment that in 1950 Japan posed a viable threat to either Russia or China appears absurd. That Stalin included this in his most candid to-date communication to Mao regarding his reasons and understanding of the war highlights the Soviet leaders', and thus Russia's, poor use of intelligence directly pertaining to the Chinese intervention into the conflict.

As discussed previously, historians within the consensus view regarding the Chinese intervention into Korea in October to November 1950 argue that this deployment of PLA troops into China represents a U.S. intelligence failure, as due to a lack of intelligence warning of this development, when the intervention actually occurred, it shocked U.S. policymakers and high-

⁴⁰ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 193; Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 383.

⁴¹ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 335.

level military officers. Several prominent themes emerge from the within these arguments, including that these historians almost exclusively reference CIA intelligence estimates in their accusations of American intelligence failure, neglecting to include relative estimates from other U.S. intelligence agencies and sources. Another argument from within the consensus contends that, at the opening and first stages of the Korean War, the U.S. intelligence apparatus suffered from severe administrative dysfunction and capability atrophy following the post-WWII draw-down in forces, and thus offered poor warning of the Chinese intentions to enter the war. Still another prominent argument focuses not on poor U.S. collection or dissemination of intelligence, but a lack of receptivity within top U.S. administration and military circles to the intelligence which clearly indicated an imminent Chinese military intervention.⁴² While all of these approaches to the Chinese deployment of troops to Korea present persuasive arguments, a careful examination of available primary sources, an exploration of some provocative assertions from Thornton, and a logic-based analysis of the available historical evidence indicates that the U.S. collected, disseminated, analyzed, and interpreted intelligence effectively and acted upon it according to American strategic objectives as laid out in NSC 68 and NSC 81/1.

Finding references to CIA estimates which reflect the agency's failure to accurately assess Chinese intentions in the late fall of 1950 proves a relatively effortless task. As Erik Dahl notes, "The CIA warned soon after the war had begun in June [1950] that Chinese forces could

⁴² For examples of this argument, see William T. Bowers, and John T. Greenwood, *Combat in Korea: Passing the Test, April – June 1951* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 2-3, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/reader.action?ppg=1&docID=792348&tm=1487753611735>; Michael D. Pearlman, *Truman & MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 116, accessed March 2, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=232237&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_c; and

become involved. But though on the one hand the CIA was providing worrisome tactical reporting—such as that Chinese units composed of ethnic Korean soldiers appeared to be prepared to become involved—on the other hand it was providing more reassuring strategic analysis that there were no indications that the Soviets intended to have China intervene.”⁴³ Dahl continues, stating, “As an article in the CIA in-house journal notes, this type of balancing act ‘became the preferred art form for most Agency reporting through late November [1950].’”⁴⁴ Many other historians, including Major Justin Haynes, Michael Turner, and Jian Chen, note this pattern of CIA accuracy in collecting and reporting on current Chinese troop buildup along the Korean border, while downplaying the likelihood of a major PLA intervention.⁴⁵ Indeed, when one examines the CIA estimates from this period in the late fall of 1950, these historians’ arguments appear credible, as the documents identify the Chinese threat and capability to enter Korea, but fail to commit to a prediction that a major PLA intervention is imminent. As Burton Ira Kaufman points out, even when the CIA finally “...determined in October that the Chinese

⁴³ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 69, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁴ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 69, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁵ Justin M. Haynes, *Intelligence Failure in Korea: Major General Charles A. Willoughby’s Role in the United Nations Command’s Defeat in November 1950* (United States: Pickle Publishing, 2015), Kindle Edition, Locations 322-4; Michael A. Turner, *Why Secret Intelligence Fails* (Dulles, VA: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 22, accessed March 5, 2017, http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=388735&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover; Jian Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 170, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=79596&site=eds-live&scope=site>; and Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: An Interpretative History* (London: Routledge, 1999), 111-12, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=84679&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

would enter the war,” the assessment stated that this incursion would serve “...only for the purpose of defending [Chinese] power stations along the Yalu.”⁴⁶ Given this evidence, it appears that if one examines only CIA estimates from this period immediately prior to the Chinese intervention in late October to early November 1950, one is left to conclude that the CIA, at least, intelligence in its predictive analysis of Chinese intentions in fall of 1950.

However, as covered in Chapter 1, Mitchell points out that as early as July 1950, six months before the Chinese intervention, the U.S. AFSA successfully intercepted multiple communications from which one could only extrapolate that a major Chinese offensive into Korea was imminent.⁴⁷ That the AFSA did collect and report these intercepts is beyond dispute. What remains to explore here is whether U.S. analysts incorporated this intelligence into an accurate predictive analysis, made recommendations to U.S. leadership based on this intelligence, and whether these policymakers acted accordingly.

As background, Thornton points out that as president, Truman oversaw the creation of both the CIA and National Security Agency (NSA), the federal agency primarily tasked with SIGINT intelligence collection and analysis related to national security.⁴⁸ Thornton also notes that Truman “...never mentioned the existence of the NSA,...or any of its predecessors, and his biographers have shown ‘a similar disinclination to dwell on’ sensitive intelligence issues.”⁴⁹ Given this inhibition to discuss matters involving intelligence, it seems unsurprising the manner

⁴⁶ Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Korean Conflict* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999) 46, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=75508&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁷ Arthur H. Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 179-81, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1336666>.

⁴⁸ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 349.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

in which Truman chose to explain, at least publicly, the apparent U.S. unpreparedness for both the NKA invasion and Chinese intervention. Thornton explains that, “Truman could not say that SIGINT did not exist, yet to acknowledge its existence would imply advance knowledge that the war was coming and raise questions regarding the failure to take preventive action.”⁵⁰ So, in the case of the NKA invasion, Truman argued that, “...America’s intelligence capability had atrophied and Korea moreover had not been identified as a prime collection target.”⁵¹ Thornton continues, stating, “The [Truman] administration could not also argue ‘intelligence failure’ once the war began,” but that, “Incredibly...the Truman administration did make the same argument with regard to Chinese intervention that it made with regard to the North Korean attack, even though a massive Chinese troop presence was undeniable in October [1950].”⁵² Thornton’s point stands to logic—if one believes the still questionable assertion from Truman that the U.S. intelligence capabilities had atrophied following WWII, and that Korea was not a prime collection target, the same explanation could not be reasonably asserted four months later when the Chinese intervened in Korea, and over a month after the U.S. had conducted the major landing at Inchon in mid-September.

Mitchell’s revelation of AFSA intercepts indicating a Chinese intervention as early as July 1950, along with Thornton’s points regarding Truman’s reluctance to discuss sensitive intelligence matters and the improbability of U.S. leadership, to include Truman, remaining unaware of the impending Chinese intervention, prove persuasive counterpoints to the CIA estimates of the period. Without delving into conspiracy concepts, such points call into question

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 350-1.

the accuracy of the CIA assessments which identified the presence of substantial PLA forces near and within Korea, yet consistently downplayed the threat of a full-scale intervention. Of course, if intelligence existed which clearly indicated the impending intervention, which Mitchell shows it did, and Truman and his administration were aware of the imminent intervention, which Thornton argues compellingly that they were, then the question remains: Why did Truman deny foreknowledge of the Chinese military intervention in Korea?

In an effort to answer this question, it appears necessary to first address the seemingly unrelated issues expressed in some historians' consensus views that the U.S. intelligence apparatus suffered from general dysfunction, and that a lack of receptivity to the notion of a widescale Chinese intervention existed amongst U.S. policymakers just prior to, and in the first stages of, the Korean conflict.

In his book involving what he alleges as the U.S. intelligence failure to accurately assess and warn U.S. leadership of the imminent Chinese military entry into the Korean War, Justin Haynes posits that MacArthur's chief intelligence officer Maj. Gen. "Willoughby and the Central Intelligence Agency accurately identified China's rapid build-up of combat forces and related infrastructure in Manchuria from July through early October, yet they struggled to identify the Chinese intentions."⁵³ This statement aligns with the consensus view which argues that up to October 8, 1950, the CIA accurately identified the threat of a Chinese incursion into Korea, yet consistently assessed that a full-scale PLA intervention was unlikely. Here, Haynes argues that MacArthur's intelligence reflected this same pattern of assessment. Haynes asserts that the root

⁵³ Justin M. Haynes, *Intelligence Failure in Korea: Major General Charles A. Willoughby's Role in the United Nations Command's Defeat in November 1950* (United States: Pickle Publishing, 2015), Kindle Edition, Locations 264-5.

of Willoughby's analytical mistakes lay in the general's "personal control over intelligence reporting and analysis" which "significantly limited independent analysis and competing hypotheses."⁵⁴ Further, Haynes argues, Willoughby and his analysts "...frequently fell victim to mirror imaging in misidentifying the Chinese decisive point for entering the war," defining mirror imaging as "...a concept wherein analysts inadvertently base their assessments on how the analysts themselves would act as opposed to taking the point of view of the enemy."⁵⁵ While Haynes offers compelling arguments regarding possible dysfunction within and between Willoughby's G2 section and the CIA, Thornton, as we shall see, these positions with primary source evidence and arguments of his own, within which one might begin to understand the alleged ineptitude of both MacArthur's intelligence section and the CIA, as well as Truman's motivations for declining to publicly acknowledge his prior awareness of the imminent Chinese intervention.

The other issue many historians arguing from the topic's consensus perspective present involves a relative unreceptiveness within U.S. military and policymaking circles to intelligence assessment indicating an inevitable, full-scale Chinese intervention on the Korean peninsula. As Erik Dahl states, "The intervention of Chinese troops into the conflict in Korea in the fall of 1950 presented a second great shock to American leaders and intelligence officials, and it has been seen by historians as an even more puzzling intelligence failure."⁵⁶ Dahl notes that historians

⁵⁴ Justin M. Haynes, *Intelligence Failure in Korea: Major General Charles A. Willoughby's Role in the United Nations Command's Defeat in November 1950* (United States: Pickle Publishing, 2015), Kindle Edition, Locations 855-6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Locations 1636-9.

⁵⁶ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 70, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

such as Richard Betts explain the cause of this supposed shock, stating, "...the bulk of the blame lies with American policymakers and senior military officials, who through a 'mix of hubris, wishfulness, and miscalculation' did not believe that China would invade and refused to accept the warnings they received."⁵⁷ Dahl himself explains, "Here the crucial factor missing was receptivity to the intelligence on the part of decision makers. The intelligence should have been actionable given its specificity, but the crucial ingredient of receptivity was lacking."⁵⁸ So, if one ascribes to Dahl's arguments, despite specific and overwhelming evidence, gleaned through not only U.S., but even British intelligence, that the Chinese intervention would occur, factors within the U.S. civilian and military leadership such as ego, wishful thinking, and misinterpretation trumped the stark reality of hundreds of thousands of PLA troops massing on the Korean border.⁵⁹ However, with such profound implications at stake in a possible Chinese intervention into Korea, this seems an unlikely explanation for the U.S. leadership's lack of receptiveness to the undeniable presence of large deployments of Chinese troops near and within Korea.

With the backdrop of Truman's hesitation to discuss any sensitive intelligence matters, specifically the NSA or U.S. SIGINT capabilities, Thornton explains, "There were at least two and possibly three instances in October and November when Truman could have settled for

⁵⁷ Ibid., 71-2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁹ William T. Bowers, and John T. Greenwood, *Combat in Korea: Passing the Test, April – June 1951* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 2-3, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/reader.action?ppg=1&docID=792348&tm=1487753611735>.; For further discussion of British intelligence indicating a massing of PLA troop on the Sino-Korean border, see John Thomas Farquhar, *A Need to Know: The Role of Air Force Reconnaissance in War Planning, 1945-1953* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2004), 133-4, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=184936&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

substantially more than the status quo ante bellum, leaving South Korea the victor and North Korea perhaps terminally weakened...but he declined.”⁶⁰ Before detailing his specific arguments regarding these three junctures involving the Chinese military intervention in October to November 1950, Thornton prefaces these points with “...the assumption that the huge deployment of troops to border crossing points, the growing volume of communication between Beijing and its forces as well as the signals intercepts of those communications, clearly revealed Beijing’s preparations to intervene.” In other terms, Thornton logically assumes that all of these factors would allow U.S. intelligence, especially SIGINT assets, to detect the imminent PLA troop deployment into Korea, and warn the U.S. leadership accordingly.

The three junctures which Truman references represent moments at which Truman might have sought settlement with the DPRK and CCP and gained a position more advantageous than the pre-war situation (north of the 38th parallel).⁶¹ However, as Thornton notes, at all three junctures, Truman chose to continue fighting and even push north, and “...the nature of Chinese Communist involvement was a response to advances by U.N. forces into prepared positions occupied by Chinese forces.”⁶² The implication here is that in order to occupy these prepared Chinese positions, the U.N. forces must have had prior knowledge of these Chinese movement and activity. Thornton argues that this foreknowledge came via American SIGINT intercepts of PLA forces, and thus that U.S. military as well as civilian leadership were well aware of the Chinese intervention, both before it occurred and in its ongoing stages. So, regardless of any hubris or misinterpretation on the part of American political and military leadership, or their

⁶⁰ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 351.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁶² *Ibid.*

supposed lack of receptivity to the largescale Chinese troop presence within Korea, or even the likely dysfunction with intelligence agencies and units as Haynes argues, it appears that these policymakers and generals knew of and acted on intelligence to this effect. Nonetheless, the question remains as to why Truman and administration, along with his military commanders (most notably MacArthur), would deny foreknowledge of the PLA intervention, despite that events on the battlefield pointed to the contrary.

Thornton explains the denials from Truman, his administration, and American military leadership, most notably MacArthur, with a threefold argument. First, and perhaps foremost, “In implementing NSC-68, President Truman had determined to reassert American supremacy in the face of a growing Soviet threat.”⁶³ Thornton posits that following MacArthur’s successful landing at Inchon in September 1950, “Truman would shift policy from deterrence to compulsion—from attempting to keep the Chinese out of the war to keeping them in it. Combatting the Sino-Soviet menace was the strategy called for in NSC-68 and Truman would act consistently with its precepts, disdaining any opportunity to divide Moscow and Beijing.”⁶⁴ Given this argument, had Truman, his administration, or his military commanders acknowledged their foreknowledge of the Chinese intervention, the international community and their U.N. allies would doubtlessly sought a diplomatic solution to avoiding a Sino-American armed engagement, and Truman would have lost his opportunity to implement the directive from NSC 68, which called for confronting the Sino-Soviet threat. More specific to this effort, in examining NSC 68, the document calls for “An improvement and intensification of intelligence activities”

⁶³ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 353.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 277-8.

against the communist threat.⁶⁵ To admit to a prior awareness of the Chinese intervention would have jeopardized an American opportunity to collect intelligence on three communist foes of the United States—Russia, China, as well as the DPRK.

The second layer to Thornton's argument involves the precarious support and ever-increasing concern from American UN allies in Korea over the potential for Chinese intervention in the conflict. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, Thornton argues that at an October 15, 1950 meeting on Wake Island, "Truman must have warned MacArthur not to acknowledge the early presence of 'major' Chinese forces in Korea should he encounter them, lest the allies demand a premature withdrawal."⁶⁶ Thornton bases this argument on primary source documents indicating that MacArthur's chief intelligence officer, Maj. Gen. Willoughby, greatly reduced his reports of Chinese troop numbers in Korea after this Wake Island meeting relative to those submitted beforehand.⁶⁷ In effect, Thornton argues, in an effort to maintain UN allied military and diplomatic support for the U.S. implementation of NSC 68 in Korea, Truman had directed MacArthur to ensure that his FEC G2 section's intelligence estimates reflected those of the CIA, which accounted for a Chinese troop buildup along the Sino-Korean border, but stopped short of acknowledging a full-scale Chinese military troop deployment on the peninsula. This argument

⁶⁵ "National Security Council Report, NSC 68, 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,'" published April 14, 1950, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives*, 21, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116191>; for further interpretation of NSC 68 as it pertained to China, see Elizabeth Edwards Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 180, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=162293&site=eds-live&scope=site>; and Michael Shally-Jensen, *Defining Documents in American History: The 1950s (1950-1959)* (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2016) 8, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/lib/snhu-ebooks/reader.action?ppg=1&docID=4684351&tm=1487763232142>.

⁶⁶ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 359.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

would explain Haynes' note that intelligence estimates from both the CIA and Willoughby's intelligence section failed to include an imminent Chinese intervention in their analyses.

This point leads directly to the third and final portion of his argument, that in his determination to implement NSC 68 and confront the Sino-Soviet threat in Korea, Truman realized that he “obviously could not escape a considerable share of the blame for enlarging the conflict with Korea, but he was determined not to take sole responsibility. He had decided...that some of that responsibility would be shared by General Douglas MacArthur.”⁶⁸ In order to set the stage for MacArthur sharing this culpability, on October 9, 1950, just six days prior to their meeting on Wake Island, Truman authorized a directive from the Joint Combined Services which reneged MacArthur's independent authority, as stipulated in NSC 81/1, to use air and naval forces against enemy targets outside of Korea, now requiring the UN commander to ““obtain authorization from Washington prior to taking any military action against objectives in China.””⁶⁹ This left MacArthur in an impossible military position, effectively requiring the general “...to engage major Chinese forces where he would not be permitted to use all of the weapons at his disposal,” and ensured that MacArthur would be eager to meet with Truman on Wake Island.⁷⁰

At a publicized conference on Wake Island, “...Truman managed to elicit from MacArthur his views on the possibility of Chinese intervention, that is, the estimate that Truman had communicated to MacArthur during their private meeting,” to which MacArthur replied,

⁶⁸ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 353.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 357.

“‘Very little...’”⁷¹ Though MacArthur’s own intelligence, which Willoughby supplied, indicated a Chinese “‘capability to intervene’” with “‘heavy concentration’” of forces, “‘if his commander in chief urged him to forward, it follows, promised him support, [MacArthur] would obey.’”⁷² Unfortunately for MacArthur, and the general U.S. intelligence effort involving the Chinese intervention, Truman had laid a political trap for the general in which, “...when the Chinese Communists did intervene, Truman would claim that MacArthur had ‘mised’ him.”⁷³ Truman had meshed his domestic political agenda with his war strategy in Korea, creating a situation in which not even the commander of all American and UN forces in that theater could candidly report or act on viable intelligence regarding the very real threat of a largescale Chinese intervention.

In these three arguments, Thornton offers detailed explanations of Truman’s likely motivations for refusing to acknowledge that U.S. intelligence had accurately warned him of and predicted the Chinese intervention. However, the president’s various acts of meddling in how his intelligence agencies reported the imminent Chinese military entry in the Korean conflict resulted in flawed PLA troop estimates. As Thornton notes, “When the true dimensions of the Chinese presence in Korea were realized, it was too late.”⁷⁴ Nonetheless, it remains important to note that the mistake lay in the number of PLA troops, not that the Chinese intervention was imminent.

⁷¹ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 360.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 361.

⁷³ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 353.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 360.

It seems undeniable that in Truman's determination to implement the directives of NSC 68 to confront the Sino-Soviet threat in Korea, his directive to MacArthur, in order to avoid a withdrawal of UN allied troops, that the general should alter his command's intelligence to reflect CIA assessments which downplayed the Chinese troop presence on the peninsula, and his act of domestic political self-preservation in entrapping MacArthur to share culpability when the Chinese intervened, the president undermined the accuracy of U.S. intelligence estimates relative to the Chinese entry into the war. Contrary to the assertions from Haynes and others positing similar arguments, therefore, it seems that the origin of dysfunction in MacArthur's G2 section lay not with Willoughby, but with the president and his obedient commander in the Korean theater. These actions from Truman, it might be reasonably argued, constitute a strategic blunder in the use of intelligence, as the final products during the period of October and much of November 1950, the intelligence estimates and recommendations, did not reflect the true battlefield picture in Korea and China's involvement in it. Provided the strategic context of these actions, though, and that Truman's decision to alter intelligence estimates indicates not only his diplomatic acumen and geopolitical awareness of his UN allies' concerns, but that Truman was aware of the genuine numbers of Chinese in Korea—and that he needed to hide this reality in order to maintain his UN alliance.

Mitchell and Thornton explain that through AFSA intercepts of Chinese communications as early as July 1950, and evidence that UN forces precisely advanced on occupied Chinese positions on three separate pivotal occasions in October and November 1950, U.S. SIGINT capabilities allowed the U.S. forces to act effectively on tactical intelligence relative to the Chinese military threat in Korea. Despite Truman's interference in the portrayal of Chinese troop

strength within strategic level products, U.S. and UN forces appear to have had access to and acted upon accurate tactical intelligence of PLA dispositions.

When one comparative analyzes the DPRK, China, Soviet Russia, and the United States in their respective uses of intelligence pertaining to the Chinese entry into the Korean War, two pairings emerge from the initial assessment. In the DPRK and China, this pair of countries appears similar in their catastrophic and ineffective use of intelligence. As for the USSR and the U.S., it seems arguable that these two nations, while doubtlessly imperfect in their intelligence operations, nonetheless exhibit potential points of relative effectiveness.

Kim and his DPRK leadership's failure to even address a formalized command structure between their NKA and the Chinese PLA forces prior to December 1950, almost half a year after the initial North Korean invasion, represents an indefensible error in the communication of basic intelligence information with a key military ally. Further, that Kim and his subordinates appointed a foreign national military officer to command their armies in a war on their own soil, and thus through whom all North Korean intelligence would assuredly flow, constitutes a failure to protect national security intelligence from a foreign power. Such neglect for establishing communications with their Chinese military ally, and poor handling of decisions with such deep impact on the DPRK's ability to independently conduct intelligence operations can only be assessed as severe strategic intelligence failures directly pertinent to the Chinese intervention.

Mao and the CCP leadership's primary error in their use of intelligence lies in Mao's self-professed justification for China's full-scale military involvement in Korea. Despite contradicting NSC 81/1, which outlines the American directives and intentions for U.S. involvement in the Korean conflict, Mao based his decision to enter the war on his belief that the

U.S. planned to invade China via the Korean peninsula. Such a misinterpretation of American intentions, not for a Chinese lack of available intelligence of the combat situation in Korea, displays a failure in Mao's predictive analysis of this intelligence. At a cost of nearly a million Chinese troops' lives, and undoubtedly lengthening the war in its implementation, this miscalculation represents perhaps the most prominent, impactful example of ineffective use of intelligence throughout the entire war, by any nation.

In his resolution to withhold information, or even openly acknowledge Soviet-DPRK plans of an NKA invasion into the ROK from Mao, some historians argue that Stalin deviously manipulated both Mao and Kim into fighting the Americans for Russia. However, in Stalin's attempts keep plans from Mao about the impending NKA invasion, Kim betrayed his promise to Stalin to maintain secrecy on the matter, specifically with respect to the Chinese, and informed Mao that Stalin had agreed to the North Korean offensive south of the 38th parallel. The resulting mistrust within the alliance, and Stalin's inability to maintain a secret of such a geopolitically impactful and sensitive nature, represent a failure in predictive analysis regarding Mao's potential negative reaction upon learning of these plans, as well as a failure to protect strategic intelligence, as Stalin had in effect created in withholding the invasion plans from Mao. Although Stalin nonetheless achieved his short and intermediate goals "of subordinating China to Soviet design and preventing the development of a Chinese-American relationship," Mao's long-term mistrust of Stalin and Soviet Russia would show Stalin's deceit as an unnecessary gamble with drastic consequences for Stalin's country.⁷⁵ Mao, based on his own intelligence

⁷⁵ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 6.

misinterpretation that the U.S. intended to invade China, appears to have been committed to military intervention regardless of whether Stalin was up front with him regarding the NKA invasion. By the time the first Chinese troops entered Korea under Mao's order, it seems certain, Mao had moved past true allegiance to the Soviet leader, and was determined thenceforth to reject subordination from another foreign power or, most precisely, Soviet Russia.

As for the United States, the story of the alleged intelligence failure purporting an American unpreparedness and lack of prior knowledge of the Chinese intervention, in both popular culture and many scholarly circles, is mostly just that—a story. While Truman meddled significantly in Chinese troop estimates reported in strategic products, in an effort to implement the mandate of NSC 68 to combat Sino-Soviet aggression, avoid a premature allied withdrawal, and preserve his domestic political approval, the impact on intelligence involved but a portion of the overall strategic intelligence picture. Despite flawed reporting on PLA troop estimates active on the Korean peninsula, and contrary the consensus view amongst historians, Truman, his administration, and his military commanders such as MacArthur at the very least could not ignore the presence of hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops along the Sino-Korean border, nor the SIGINT intercepts from the AFSA indicating a largescale Chinese intervention. Further, such intercepts almost assuredly explain the ability of UN forces to advance on occupied PLA positions in Korea on three separate, crucial occasions during October and November 1950. Despite the interference in intelligence dissemination from the executive office, American forces proved able to collect, report, and effectively act on tactical intelligence on the Korean battlefield.

Given the profound intelligence failures which the DPRK and China committed pertaining to the Chinese intervention, these two nations appear unworthy of consideration in

terms of determining which of the four nations most effectively used intelligence at this critical juncture in the war. That leaves Russia and the U.S. for the comparative analysis, and as the scope of this chapter is restricted to the Chinese intervention, a few points demand attention before addressing and comparing each nation's use of intelligence in the implementation of its overall strategy. First, although Stalin achieved his objective of Mao sending PLA troops to aid NKA forces in Korea, he did so at the cost of Mao's trust by failing to protect his invasion plan intelligence from Mao, and then revealed that as late as October 1950, the Soviet leader continued to fear a Japanese military threat long since subdued through American occupation and policy control. Second, Truman's sabotage of viable intelligence reporting on Chinese troop numbers in Korea was indeed a profound mismanagement and undermining of U.S. intelligence operations, but this portion of data presented within overall intelligence estimates appears to have been confined to strategic, national-level reporting. Truman, his administration, and U.S. military commanders were all aware of an imminent threat of a Chinese military incursion into Korea due to, at the very least, tactical SIGINT reporting indicative of this development as early as July 1950. Moreover, UN forces' repeated advancement against occupied Chinese positions indicates that despite any executive interference involving Chinese troop estimates, U.S. forces proved privy to accurate, actionable tactical intelligence. When objectively compared, Stalin's failures generally indicate a flawed, uninformed grasp on pertinent intelligence, while the U.S., with the exception of Truman's meddling, proved accurate in its intelligence assessments of the impending and ongoing PLA troop deployment in Korea.

Chapter 4: Assessing Overall Strategy



Figure 3: MacArthur Greets Truman on Wake Island, October 15, 1950¹

¹ “‘The U.S. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, UN Command, greeting President Harry S. Truman upon his arrival at Wake Island for their conference,’ October 15, 1950,” U.S. Defense Imagery, accessed May 19, 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Truman_and_MacArthur_on_Wake_Island_1950.JPG. For a discussion of this meeting’s possible implications to subsequent U.S. intelligence estimates of PLA troop numbers, see this paper, Chapters 1 and 3, which cite Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 359.

Though arguably a regional war, the strategic implications of the Korean War on the belligerents involved therein were undoubtedly on a global scale, as the emerging superpowers of the United States and Soviet Russia began to learn how quickly into which the Cold War could boil over into heated a conflict. North Korea and China, too, quickly learned how a war fought in the shadow of Soviet-American strategic competition could unexpectedly influence their own strategic agendas in dramatic ways. Intelligence and the effectiveness in which each nation used it would play a decisive role in the outcome of the war, as undefined and as of yet undetermined it has proven.

Kim Il Sung, unparalleled in terms of power and influence within the DPRK leadership by June 1950, dictated North Korean foreign policy and military strategy for his nation during the Korean War, provided, as most scholars concur despite Cumings' arguments to the contrary, that Stalin granted his prior approval for any such plans.² Kim's primary strategic objective in instigating the war through his invasion south of the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950 was to overthrow the U.S.-allied ROK government and unify the entire Korean peninsula under his and the DPRK's communist control. Obviously, given the present-day status of the DPRK-ROK boundary along the same 38th parallel his NKA forces crossed nearly 70 years ago, Kim proved incapable of achieving this most general strategic objective. However, it is Kim's and the DPRK leadership's use of intelligence towards this goal that this chapter seeks to assess, so a closer look at the relevant historical record seems in order.

² For a historiographical discussion involving Cumings' arguments on Soviet-North Korean dynamics during the Korean conflict, see Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project* (November 1993), 6, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Working_Paper_8.pdf.

Gaddis cites a January 19, 1950 telegram which the Soviet ambassador to the DPRK sent to Stalin, describing Kim's declaration that the time for a forcible reunification of Korea under DPRK control had arrived.³ Although not the first such proposal to the Soviets from Kim, this represented the first serious Soviet entertainment of the concept, and that Stalin discussed the matter with Mao during the chairman's visit to Moscow that same month.⁴ Gaddis also relates that when Kim subsequently visited Moscow in April 1950, the DPRK leader and his generals assured a likely dubious Stalin that, "...the Americans would never participate in the war..."⁵ Pantsov and Levine describe how, upon his return from this visit in which Stalin indicated his general approval of the North Korean invasion concept, Kim "shrewdly" sent an aide to China to inform Mao and the CCP leadership of his and Stalin's backdoor agreement on the matter, and requesting "...only the three Korean divisions in the PLA" as support for the enterprise.⁶ The authors appear to laud this passive-aggressive maneuver, stating, "Kim's was a clever gambit."⁷ Pantsov and Levine even seem to justify Kim's confidence in a quick victory over his southern brethren, driven by his belief that the Americans would elect a policy of nonintervention.

Citing a 1966 assessment from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign affairs which details Soviet and Chinese involvement in the Korean conflict to support their statements, the authors state, "The armed forces of North Korea were clearly superior to the army of South Korean president Syngman Rhee. Kim had twice as many troops and artillery pieces, seven times as many machine guns, thirteen times as many automatic rifles, six and half times as many tanks, and six

³ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 73.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 378.

⁷ Ibid.

times as many planes.”⁸ Certainly, according to this data, Kim’s military far surpassed that of the South Koreans in nearly every measure.

If one can look past Kim’s miscalculation in his predictive analysis of likely American courses of action in the event of an NKA invasion into the U.S.-allied ROK, the DPRK leader’s action leading up to the offensive very well might be considered as shrewd or clever, as Pantsov and Levine submit. As the authors note, “Kim needed Mao’s help but did not want to become too dependent upon the Chinese,” and, “It was impossible to disobey Stalin” regarding Kim’s promise to the Soviet leader to keep mum about the invasion plans.⁹ So, in sending an aide to request Mao for the Korean PLA divisions, Kim, while not technically expressly articulating to Mao news of the invasion plans agreed upon with Stalin, nonetheless passive-aggressively signaled a deductive Mao of these plans, but also, in effect, presented the chairman with an order for troops he could not refuse, given Stalin’s implied consent. Kim could thus claim innocence to Stalin in breaking his promise of secrecy regarding the invasion, while placing himself in a position of power, albeit situational and temporary, over Mao.

Kim’s “clever,” passive-aggressive handling of sensitive information provided him with a temporary advantage over another nation, China, while leaving him with plausible deniability should Stalin accuse the North Korean leader of a betrayal of trust. Further, Kim’s assessment of DPRK forces versus that of the ROK reflects at least a partial logic-based understanding of the intelligence picture through which one can understand his confidence in a quick reunification of

⁸ “On the Korean War, 1950-1952, and the Armistice Negotiations,” August 09, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation, Fond 5, Opis 58, Delo 266, 1, Listy 122-131. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Kathryn Weathersby. Published in CWIHP Bulletin 3, accessed on April 17, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114787>, as referenced in Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 378.

⁹ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 378.

Korea. However, as the other half of the foundational justification of this confidence, Kim's assessment that the United States would not intervene militarily in the event of an attack against the ROK represents an inexcusable neglect for the geopolitical intelligence picture which evolved by the summer of 1950. As Weathersby argues, "In early 1950, U.S. policymakers' concerns about the danger to the United States and its allies from further Soviet territorial expansion had been heightened by two events of the previous year, the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb in August 1949 and the establishment that October of a revolutionary communist government in China."¹⁰ Even as Weathersby notes that, in the months preceding the June 1950 NKA invasion south, high-level American officials publicly stated "the [Truman] administration's decision not to intervene should North Korea attempt to reunify the peninsula by force," Kim and the rest of world should have taken these statement within the context of the growing Cold War tensions between Washington and Moscow, rather than as a definitive policy.¹¹

With the stakes realistically including global nuclear war, as well as the fate of his own regime, Kim's failure to accurately assess the geopolitical, or even the geographical situation in which the invasion would take place seems unfathomable. In June 1950, the Korean peninsula, hanging off of the far eastern edge of the Asian mainland continent, held borders with both Soviet Russia and Communist China, and sat less than 600 miles from U.S.-occupied Japan. When one factors in the events of 1949 which Weathersby mentions, the ascension of Soviet Russia as a nuclear power in 1949, along with Mao's securement of communist control in China,

¹⁰ Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project* (November 1993), 6, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Working_Paper_8.pdf.

¹¹ Ibid.

and that multiple U.S. divisions occupied nearby Japan, Kim's prediction of a passive American response to a military invasion and takeover of its one democratic ally in the region outside of Japan seems an absurd calculation and a failure to accurately predict his adversary's intentions based on the available intelligence.

Moreover, Kim's "clever" passive-aggressive maneuverings within the communist alliance in the months leading up to the invasion appear more unnecessary, ego-driven risks than calculated, effective uses of sensitive information. After all, Stalin had made clear he would at least not stand in Kim's way in his aims at reunification, and further pledged PLA support to Kim should the need arise. Risking the support of his Soviet sponsors, and seeding mistrust or resentment, or both, from Mao in his passive-aggressive revelation of the invasion plans through his request for Korean PLA troops, Kim ultimately failed to protect intelligence information and undermined his allies' support in so doing.

When NKA forces faced annihilation as U.N. forces gained the advantage in the fall of 1950, and Kim finally turned to Mao for PLA support, primary source evidence indicates that Kim and the DPRK had failed to even address a joint NKA-PLA command structure at this late stage of the war.¹² Further, when the Chinese and North Koreans finally established this joint command structure in December 1950, nearly six months into the war, Kim allowed Peng Dehuai, a Chinese general, to sit as its commander.¹³ Neglecting to simply address such a vital aspect of military operations—establishing who is in command—would alone constitute a failure

¹² "Letter from Zhou Enlai to Stalin," October 14, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office) and Zhongyang dang'anguan (Central Archives), eds., *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao* (Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 404-405, trans. Jingxia Yang and Douglas Stiffler, accessed February 17, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114216>.

¹³ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 198, 345-6.

to communicate information of intelligence value with a primary ally, but when one factors in that Kim and the DPRK leadership allowed a Chinese general to command the joint PLA-NKA forces, thus sacrificing control of North Korean intelligence to a foreign power, it seems obvious that Kim and his subordinates committed an intelligence error of strategic proportions.

Of all of these failures, of course, the most profound which Kim committed was to presume that the Americans would choose to passively allow a forcible takeover of its democratic ROK ally. While Kim achieved initial success in the first months of his invasion south of the 38th parallel, pushing the Americans and ROK army south into Busan, by mid-September 1950 MacArthur successfully conducted the landing at Inchon with not only U.S troops, but a combined U.N. force with its parent body's blessing and the international community largely supporting it. Kim's primary strategic objective of reunifying the entire Korean peninsula under his communist control never materialized, as he failed in his predictive analysis to foresee the NKA facing a military force predominantly composed of the very Americans he predicted would refrain to intervene.

When the war effectively, though not technically, ceased in July of 1953, the same latitudinal line along the 38th parallel which divided the DPRK and ROK in June 1950 once again divided the two nations. This linear boundary persists as of the writing of this document, and one cannot help but wonder whether Kim Il Sung, if he were still alive, might hold regrets about his flawed presumption that the Americans would refrain to intervene in his attempt to forcefully overtake the entire Korean peninsula. His faulty premise led to a faulty decision to initiate the Korean War, and one can safely state that Kim's ineffective use of intelligence gained him nothing strategically and lost he and his nation much.

As Michael Sheng explains, determining the strategic motivations of Mao and the CCP leadership continues to divide historians along two major argument lines, the “national interest” and the “ideology” line, with, of course, many scholars settling on some relative combination of the two perspectives.¹⁴ For his part, Sheng approaches the topic with an alternative approach, in which the historian treats Mao as a proactive “agent” within the decision-making of the Korean War, rather than the passive subject of Stalin’s manipulation, a zealous ideologue of Leninism, or other such roles in which Mao is portrayed as reactive to external influence.¹⁵ With so much contention amongst historians regarding Mao’s genuine strategic objectives, one is left to examine the historical evidence in order to determine these motivations. Thereafter, the task remains to evaluate Mao’s effectiveness in leveraging intelligence towards these objectives.

In *Uncertain Partners*, Goncharov and his fellow authors reference an October 24, 1950 report from Zhou Enlai in which he stated, “Mao’s assessment of the ultimate aim of the American military operations in North Korea” to the CCP Politburo in which the premier states, ““Our intelligence is that [the Americans] planned first to cross the 38th parallel without provoking China and then to direct their spearhead at China. If [China] did nothing, the aggressive enemy would surely continue its advance up to the Yalu River and would devise a second scheme [against China].”¹⁶ This statement clearly articulates that Mao based his decision to intervene in the Korean conflict based on a flawed assessment of the American intention to

¹⁴ Michael Sheng, “Mao’s Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision,” *Twentieth Century China* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 270-1, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1521538514Z.00000000048>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁶ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 193.

invade China on intelligence. This statement identifies Mao's primary strategic objective for entering the war—national defense against a perceived American invasion of China.

This argument seems to fall somewhere outside of both the national interest and the ideology approach to Mao's objectives for the war, while not going quite as far as Sheng, as seen in the scholar's statement, "The fact that Mao was proactively pursuing an interventionist policy long before China's border security was under direct threat challenges the assumption of the 'national interest' interpretation. I argue that, in addition to being committed to Leninist ideology and believing in the inevitability of war with imperialist America, Mao also aspired to be the 'Lenin of the East,' ...which motivated him to intervene in Korea proactively."¹⁷ Within the context of the topic's historiography, then, the above stated argument fits into Sheng's "agent" approach, minus Sheng's position that Mao wished to be the "'Tito of the East.'"

Having established Mao's strategic objective of defending China from American invasion through a full-scale military intervention in Korea, the chairman's effectiveness in applying intelligence to meeting this goal requires assessment. As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, CCP leadership telegrams from the fall of 1950 indicate that Mao and his CCP subordinates enjoyed ready and consistent access to intelligence pertaining to the Korean battlefield. Further, NSC 81/1, the document which dictated UN military operations in Korea as of September 9, 1950, authorized only air and naval strikes on targets outside of the Korean theater, conspicuously omitting land-based attacks, and only in the event of UN forces engaging major PLA forces south of the 38th parallel.¹⁸ So, one cannot claim that Mao concluded that the U.S. intended to

¹⁷ Michael Sheng, "Mao's Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision," *Twentieth Century China* 39, no. 3 (September 2014): 269-271, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1521538514Z.00000000048>.

¹⁸ "National Security Council Report, NSC 81/1, 'United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea,'" September 9, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Truman Presidential Museum and Library, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116194>.

invade China via Korea for a lack of available Chinese intelligence. Further, NSC 81/1 clearly shows that the U.S. not only did not intend to invade mainland China, but sought to avoid “general war with Communist China” in Korea and in general. Given these arguments, Mao clearly committed an intelligence failure in the very act of formulating his overall strategy. Mao intervened in the general war in order to prevent an invasion of China which the U.S. never intended to undertake.

When one considers whether Mao achieved his objective of preventing a U.S. military invasion of his country through his deployment of PLA troops to Korea, it could be argued that because no such invasion ever occurred, Mao achieved this goal by default. However, a more poignant perspective might be to consider if, in intervening in Korea, Mao aimed to save at least nearly a million of his people. If one accepts this logic, Mao failed to meet his strategic objective, as nearly a million Chinese soldiers lost their lives in the Korean conflict.¹⁹ Even if one dismisses that argument, the strategic objective of preventing an invasion which the U.S. never intended to conduct seems a pyrrhic victory given China’s “lost investment and development due to the estrangement from the West, which perpetuated Chinese isolation and backwardness for decades...”²⁰ Regardless of the spin put on whether Mao achieved his strategic objective of national defense against a hypothetical U.S. military incursion, the chairman’s inaccurate predictive analysis of available intelligence led him to decide on military intervention in Korea, ultimately costing China substantially more than anything it gained.

¹⁹ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 381.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Given the control through terror Stalin held over the USSR, when one discusses Soviet strategic objectives for Russian involvement in the Korean War, one can readily assume that these aims were either based on Stalin's personal judgement or that he approved of them. Stalin's complex web of strategic objectives for Russian involvement in the Korean War appear to have included, as Goncharov et. al argue, "to expand the buffer zone along his border, to create a spring board against Japan that could be used during a future global conflict, to test the American resolve, to intensify the hostility between Beijing and Washington, and, finally and foremost, to draw U.S. power away from Europe."²¹ Without leveraging intelligence effectively, it seems evident that none of these strategic goals could be realistically achieved.

Following on the line of argument presented in Chapter 3, even amongst his communist allies, Stalin exhibited a propensity for secrecy even when such withholding of information proved unnecessary, many times detrimental, to his apparent objectives. Given his general lack of candidness or outright deceit in nearly all of his communications, examining primary sources such as telegrams from Stalin or communiques issued on his orders must be taken within this context. However, a select few primary documents appear to reveal much of the Soviet premier's true strategic objectives, and the remainder can be explained logically through the geopolitical context of the Korean War era.

In his irritated response to Mao following the chairman's October 2, 1950 telegram expressing his reluctance to send PLA troops into Korea, Stalin displayed an uncharacteristic candidness regarding his continued fear of "Japanese militarism," which supports Goncharov and his fellow authors' argument that Stalin hoped to use Korea a springboard against Japan in the

²¹ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 152.

event of a future world war.²² In this telegram, Stalin also admits that, ““Of course, I took into account...[the possibility] that the USA, despite its unreadiness for a big war could still be drawn into a big war...which, in turn, would drag China into the war...”²³ This statement indirectly reflects Stalin’s objective of exacerbating tensions between China and the United States in order to prevent any alliance or *détente* between the two nations. The remaining three Soviet strategic objectives for the war require explanation outside of any expressly articulated statements from Stalin.

Goncharov et. al argue that given the U.S. military readiness status as of 1950, Stalin surmised that “With an army that had been sharply reduced after World War Two, it could not run the risk of Soviet retaliation against Western Europe or Japan,” emboldening the Soviet leader to test American military resolve.²⁴ Citing the same 1966 report from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign affairs as Weathersby, the authors assert that Stalin “...reportedly minimized the danger of any such escalation because he had bought Kim Il Sung’s argument that a North Korean attack would touch off a revolution in the South, making for a quick and easy consolidation of control” of the entire Korean peninsula.²⁵ If Stalin believed that the NKA could secure swift control over the entire peninsula, it appears to follow that he would find include extending Russia’s buffer zone through a wholly communist Korea within his strategic aims.

²² Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 383.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 152.

²⁵ On the Korean War, 1950-1952, and the Armistice Negotiations,” August 09, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation, Fond 5, Opis 58, Delo 266, 1, Listy 122-131. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Kathryn Weathersby. Published in CWIHP Bulletin 3, accessed on April 17, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114787>, as referenced in Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 152.

Moreover, it stands to reason that any conflict in far east Asia involving substantial U.S. forces would diminish available American personnel strength in Europe—a desirable and realistic goal for Stalin to have at this stage in the Cold War. Thus, all of the strategic objectives for Soviet involvement in the war as Goncharov et. al present either directly reflect Stalin’s statements or find support through other available historical evidence and arguments.

Of all the instances in which Stalin leveraged intelligence in an effort to achieve his strategic aims for the Korean conflict, perhaps none could be argued as more significantly impactful as his expressed consent to a North Korean invasion of the ROK, offered to Kim in April 1950, and which the DPRK leader acted upon some two months later. Undeniably, this invasion triggered the Korean War, a direct result of which Stalin would witness all but one of his primary war objectives completely inversed to Russia’s strategic detriment.

Within the historiography of the Korean War, historians continue to debate whether Stalin expected, or even desired, the United States to intervene in Korea following the NKA invasion. Historians such as Gaddis argue that he did not, while others such as Pantsov and Levine argue that Stalin not only anticipated, but welcomed the U.S. entry into the war in order to embroil the Americans in a costly conflict.²⁶ Given Stalin’s uncharacteristic apparent display of emotion, namely frustration, in his reply to Mao’s October 1950 hesitation to send the promised PLA troops to Korea, the Soviet leader’s admission of his lack of fear of U.S. intervention appears to indicate that Stalin at the very least understood that the prospect of American entry in the war was a realistic possibility. Regardless of his level of anticipation for

²⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83-4; Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 376.

this potentiality, however, Stalin's allowance for Kim to conduct the invasion reflects his poor predictive analysis of the available intelligence in relation to the possible second and third-order effects of the invasion.

When Stalin greenlit Kim to invade South Korea, he inadvertently provided the Truman administration with the domestic political capital to implement NSC 68 and its recommendation to triple the American defense budget.²⁷ By testing America's military resolve, Stalin had justified this enormous increase in U.S. expenditures dedicated to directly confronting the Soviet-Sino threat, a mandate which Truman would take literally and implement through a consistent broadening of U.S. military goals in Korea until the ultimate stalemate in 1953.

By the signing of the war's armistice, not only had Stalin failed to expand Russia's border with a fully communist Korean peninsula, as the boundary reverted to its original delineation along the 38th parallel, but the U.S. established a long term, substantial military presence in South Korea following the war, certainly an undesired development in such close proximity to the USSR. As for Stalin's aim to increase Sino-American hostilities, the war obviously involved overt military confrontation between the two nations, but Stalin's stinginess with military support and in sharing sensitive information with Mao resulted in the chairman's deep resentment of the Russians and in the Sino-Soviet alliance dissolving into its own hostility by the late 1950s. By the early 1970s, Mao would welcome rapprochement with the United States, reversing one of Stalin's key intended outcomes of the Korean War completely. The only strategic goal Stalin managed to attain through the war was that it drew U.S. military resources

²⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83-4.

and personnel from Europe, although even this seemingly positive outcome was likely negated by the vast materiel and funds required from the Soviets to support the PLA and NKA military efforts in Korea. Stalin's decision to consent to Kim's invasion of the ROK exhibits his failure to foresee these second and third-order effects, constituting an intelligence failure with catastrophic long-term consequences for the Soviet Union.

With the implementation of NSC 68 in April 1950, the United States shifted its strategy from an effort to create a wedge between Communist China and Soviet Russia to one wherein the U.S. would seek instead to ensure the continuance of the Chinese Nationalist government in Formosa (Taiwan), as well as Syngman Rhee's Republic of Korea. This shift aligned with the overall strategy of containment, the restriction of global communist expansionism. When Kim Il Sung initiated the NKA invasion of South Korea in June 1950, U.S. policy as specified under NSC 68 called for a swift and decisive containment of such a blatant attempt at communist expansion, which is exactly what occurred.

Samuel F. Wells, Jr. posits that the "primary achievement" of the April 1950 publishing of NSC 68 was to "...provide a warning of Soviet challenges that might require a significantly higher defense budget. This alert had prepared many officials to respond quickly and decisively when the North Korean invasion occurred."²⁸ Alonzo L. Hamby expounds on this line of argument, stating that the conflict in "Korea served as a kind of mini-Pearl Harbor, seeming to demonstrate that Communist military aggression was a real threat, presumably in Europe as well on a small Asian peninsula. By thus creating a sense of national crisis, it made large-scale

²⁸ Samuel F. Wells, "Wells's Commentary," in Ernest R. May, *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1993), 140.

rearmament a much more feasible proposition politically.”²⁹ These scholarly analyses compellingly argue that although the policy foundations of NSC 68 were primed for implementation in the spring of 1950, it took the DPRK invasion and the resulting war in Korea for the Truman administration to politically justify an authorization of the vast expansion of defense expenditures which NSC 68 recommended.

The clear threat of communist expansionism overtly displayed in the North Korean assault on its southern, democratic neighbor led the Truman administration to adhere to NSC 68 not merely as an excuse for budget increases, but as a comprehensive foreign policy. Beyond its call for steep increases in military spending, the containment policy as outlined in NSC 68 necessitated a strategic pivot, shifting from seeking cooperation with the Chinese an effort to undermine a Sino-Soviet alliance, towards a global defense against communist expansionism. The conflict in Korea in effect became among the first testing grounds for the containment policy, and thus the strategic objectives of the United States’ involvement in the Korean War mirror those as detailed in NSC 68.

The sprawling national security document labeled NSC 68 addresses nearly every conceivable aspect of the Soviet threat to the United States as of April 1950. Among the most pertinent portions to this discussion is the section outlining potential U.S. courses of action going forward from that juncture. The three possible courses of action which the document presents are 1) a continuation of current policies, 2) isolation, or 3) “a Rapid Build-up of political, Economic, and Military Strength in the Free World.”³⁰ After presenting all three courses of actions and their

²⁹ Alonzo L. Hamby, “Hamby’s Commentary,” in Ernest R. May, *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1993), 156.

³⁰ “National Security Council Report, NSC 68, ‘United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,’” published April 14, 1950, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives*, 21, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116191>.

likely outcomes, NCS 68 recommends the third course of action, a rapid buildup of economic, political, and military strength among non-communist states in order to contain communist expansionism. Addressing the military aspects of this course of action, the document states that, “It is necessary to have the military power to deter, if possible, Soviet expansion, and to defeat, if necessary, aggressive Soviet or Soviet-directed actions of a limited or total character.”³¹ This direction obviously would include the Soviet-directed NKA invasion of the ROK, as well as the Chinese intervention into the Korean conflict.

The recommendations also state that the U.S. should help “...nations as are able and willing to make an important contribution to U.S. security, to increase their economic and political stability and their military capability,” as well as, “Place the maximum strain on the Soviet structure of power and particularly on the relationships between Moscow and the satellite countries.”³² Here, NSC 68 obviously applies to the situation in 1950 Korea, as the ROK proved willing to fight the DPRK communist threat, and the U.S. engaging militarily against the DPRK and China certainly placed significant strain on Russian relations with these two Soviet satellite nations. It should be noted that in April of 1950, when the administration published NSC 68, U.S. far east policy remained focused on Formosa (Taiwan) and Mao’s China, and the document accordingly reflects the general American disinterest and perhaps even ignorance regarding Korea at the time.³³ Nonetheless, it is not an analytical overreach to view the document through the context of the sudden North Korean invasion in June 1950, as this is precisely what the

³¹ “National Security Council Report, NSC 68, ‘United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,’” published April 14, 1950, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives*, 21, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116191>.

³² Ibid.

³³ For a further assessment on post-WWII U.S. policy towards Korea, see Charles M. Dobbs, *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1982), 193-4.

Truman administration did. Almost immediately subsequent to the North Korean assault, Truman and his policymakers recognized that the invasion presented them with an opportunity to seek huge increases in the defense budget as per NSC 68, and that in turn, NSC 68 provided them with a ready-made strategy to confront the communist threats in Korea.

Perhaps foremost among U.S. strategic objectives in their involvement in the Korean War was the NSC 68-recommended containment of communist expansion, which in the specific case, meant the prevention of any communist adversary of gaining control over any ground south of the 38th parallel on the peninsula. Additionally, Truman and his administration sought to increase military funding to facilitate a massive U.S. rearmament in the wake of the post-WWII American military draw-down, and in order to maintain U.S. military superiority over the Soviets. Lastly, in adherence with the recommendations of NSC 68, once MacArthur successfully conducted the landings at Inchon in mid-September 1950, short of total war, the president sought to inflict maximum damage to the North Koreans and Chinese before withdrawing U.S. forces south of the prewar ROK-DPRK boundary along the 38th parallel.

In another example of Thornton's willingness to break from consensus views, the historian offers unique insight into the Truman administration's use of available intelligence, especially SIGINT, in its determination to implement the containment strategy in Korea following the DPRK invasion. Outside of intelligence obtained through covert collection activities, Stalin and Mao made U.S. leadership and the rest of world aware of a formal Sino-Soviet alliance with the open publication of the agreement's text on February 14, 1950.³⁴ As Thornton notes, the open source intelligence offered through the public declaration of "...the

³⁴ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 99-100.

Sino-Soviet alliance was itself sufficient grounds to persuade American leaders to change strategy.”³⁵ However, Thornton explains, “President Truman’s twofold decision on January 31 to begin a high-priority feasibility study regarding production of thermonuclear weapons...and to initiate the formulation of a new geopolitical strategy, came less than fort-eight hours after Stalin had sent a telegram to Kim Il-sung granting his approval for war in Korea.”³⁶ This new geopolitical strategy, of course, would come in the form of NSC 68. Thornton expounds beyond speculation regarding U.S. SIGINT intercepts of Soviet secret communications, stating that “...in the spring of 1948, the Army Security Agency, precursor of the National Security Agency, in cooperation with the FBI, had achieved a major breakthrough in its effort to break Soviet codes.”³⁷ Thornton quotes FBI Special Agent Robert Lamphere in his memoir as he discloses, “I can now tell of...the magnitude of the breakthrough that the deciphered KGB messages provided...the enemy would never know of our penetration; we would learn in advance his every move...”³⁸ This primary source evidence, along with the open publication of the Sino-Soviet alliance document, indicates that Truman realized through multiple sources of intelligence that a new U.S. foreign policy was in order, and thus began to shift it in accordance with the tenets of NSC 68.

When Kim Il Sung acted on the consent from Stalin to proceed with a forcible annexation of South Korea, this invasion offered the U.S. political justification to implement NSC 68 as its effective geopolitical policy. With Truman’s understanding of the intelligence picture now clear thanks to open source information and SIGINT intercepts of Soviet communications, and Kim

³⁵ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 122.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

offering an example of communist expansion which seemed scripted by NSC 68, the president could justifiably ask Congress for the huge increase to the defense budget which would fund a massive U.S. rearmament and ensure continued American superiority over the Soviets. Further, the ROK-DPRK boundary remained along the precise longitudinal line as it had been at the outset of the war. Truman's adherence to NSC 68, and the intelligence which facilitated his decision to do so, had enabled the president and his administration to achieve these two U.S. strategic objectives of the war.

A variety of factors influenced Truman's acceptance and authorization of NSC 81/1 in September 1950, the document which dictated operations parameters for UN forces in Korea (see Chapter 3). Within the context of the Korean battlefield, UN ally concerns over possible Chinese intervention was perhaps the most impactful of these factors, resulting in NSC 81/1 as "...a series of hedges constructed by the allies against" UN forces pushing north of the 38th parallel.³⁹ The compromises the U.S. made with its allies in formulating NSC 81/1 also forced Truman to direct U.S. intelligence, including personnel under MacArthur, to downplay or even deny Chinese troop presence in order to avoid an allied withdrawal from Korea and the potential for a unilateral American fight against both the Chinese and North Koreans.

Though the Truman administration's intentional falsification of intelligence reports in the fall of 1950 would appear to indicate a U.S. intelligence failure, this deliberate skewing of PLA troop numbers should not be misconstrued as Truman's lack of an accurate grasp on the Korean intelligence picture. Truman was aware of the imminent Chinese intervention, but realized that

³⁹ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 311.

true depictions of this development within U.S. intelligence estimates could jeopardize continued UN allied support in Korea. Truman was determined to align his war strategy for Korea with NSC 68, which required “a sustained, public demonstration of the Communist monolith in action.”⁴⁰

The president could not allow for the acknowledgement of major PLA forces in Korea, as it would likely prompt the allies to seek a settlement with the Chinese, or at least an allied military withdrawal, before American forces could confront the communist threat in combat and fulfill the directives of NSC 68. Truman ensured that the PLA troop number estimates remained low enough within American intelligence reporting to maintain UN allied support in Korea, ultimately resulting in a confrontation between U.S. and PLA forces which would cost the Chinese exponentially more in terms of loss of human life than that of the Americans. Ironically, then, Truman’s deliberate skewing of intelligence proved an effective use thereof, allowing him to achieve the strategic objective of inflicting maximum damage to the Communist Chinese threat, short of total war.

Each of the four nations studied here projected distinct and various strategic objectives for its involvement in the Korean War, with each experiencing similarly varied levels of success in achieving these goals. When one factors in the effectiveness of these nations’ use of intelligence towards these ends, it seems clear that possessing a clear and accurate understanding

⁴⁰ Richard C. Thornton, *Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 2000), 353.

the battlefield, along with the geopolitical context surrounding it, was an indispensable component in the process of achieving national strategic objectives.

Having examined each nation individually through this aforementioned lens, definitive conclusions, based on close examination of primary source documents and logic-based deduction, have emerged which allow for a concise comparative analysis of these nations against one another. North Korea's clear strategic objective for the war was to invade South Korea, gain forcible control and overthrow the ROK government, and reunify the entire peninsula under the Kim Il Sung's communist DPRK regime. Equally clearly, Kim and the DPRK leadership failed to meet this objective, as the present-day peninsula remains divided along the 38th parallel. Moreover, the DPRK's military failure stemmed directly from Kim's intelligence failure to anticipate an American military intervention into the war. If nothing else, the presence of multiple U.S. divisions in nearby occupied Japan, and that the ROK was essentially a U.S. invention via the UN, should have provided ample indication to Kim of an inevitable U.S. military response in the event of a North Korean invasion.

Contrary to Kim's assessment, Mao not only predicted that the U.S. would intervene in Korea, but went one hypothetical step further in his belief that the Americans intended to use the peninsula as a springboard to invade China. Mao even based his ultimate justification for Chinese intervention in the war on this flawed assessment, and though no American invasion of his country ever occurred, NSC 81/1 shows that it was never in the Americans' plans. Mao's faulty intelligence assessment, based on ample Chinese intelligence, resulting the loss of nearly a million PLA soldiers' lives, along with decades of subsequent international economic and diplomatic isolation for the CCP. Given these points, North Korea and China appear to present

parallel profiles of strategic failure, both in meeting objectives and leveraging intelligence towards those ends.

Though difficult to ascertain Stalin's true strategic aims, given his propensity for secrecy and deceit even in accessible official Soviet communications from the period, a frustrated response to Mao in October of 1950 indicates a rare candidness from the leader, and his admission that he at least understood that American entry into the war was a distinct and realistic possibility. Despite his apparent foresight that this might occur in general, it seems that Stalin neglected to consider the second and third-order effects of offering Kim his consent to invade the ROK. Instead of the Russian premier's objective of creating a security buffer around the USSR's existing perimeter, the war he greenlit resulted in a persistent and substantial U.S. military presence in nearby South Korea. While Stalin temporarily attained his goal of increased Sino-American hostility, his failure to keep his secret invasion plans from Mao, a breach of intelligence security bred the chairman's resentment and led to a Sino-Soviet split by the late 1950s. Despite his consistent pattern of myopic predictive analysis regarding the detrimental ramifications of U.S. entry into the Korean War, Stalin's shrewd abstention from direct Soviet military involvement in the conflict allowed Russia to avoid the relatively catastrophic consequences from the war as North Korea and China incurred. In general, though, Russia's use of intelligence towards its strategic Korean War goals appears ineffective and fraught with the dysfunction inherent in its one ultimate intelligence analyst and policymaker: Stalin.

Contrasting with its three communist adversaries in the Korean conflict, the American use of intelligence to meet its strategic goals, as outlined in NSC 68, proved effective, even if ironically so at times. An FBI special agent's statements in his memoir and the timing of Truman's call for the creation of the new U.S. geopolitical strategy (NSC 68) less than 48 hours

after Stalin sent a telegram to Kim indicating his consent for the NKA invasion compellingly suggest that the U.S. had decoded Soviet secret transmissions, and that intelligence gleaned from Russian intercepts motivated Truman to seek a new geopolitical strategy—containment. Further, NSC 68 offered a strategy seemingly specifically conceived for the Korean War, as Truman followed its recommendations to confront communist expansion evidenced by the NKA invasion and the Chinese intervention. Truman's conscious efforts to ensure U.S. intelligence reporting downplayed PLA troop numbers in the Korean theater evidenced his foreknowledge of the imminent Chinese invasion, as the president realized that his UN allies would seek settlement with Mao or withdraw from Korea completely should they learn of the true numbers of Chinese soldiers amassed in North Korea. Having thus misled his allies until November 1950, and after MacArthur's successful Inchon landings in September 1950, Truman had set the stage for U.S. forces to inflict maximum damage to the Chinese short of total war, per NSC 68.

The above evidence and arguments convincingly suggest that the U.S., to a significantly more profound degree than any of its communist enemies in the war, effectively leveraged intelligence to meet its strategic objectives pertaining to the Korean conflict. Moreover, the specific primary materials cited regarding Truman's directive to skew intelligence data for the purposes of maintaining allied UN support greatly help to explain the public perception that U.S. intelligence failed to anticipate and warn policymakers of the impending Chinese intervention. The supposed surprise resulting from the Chinese entering war, it seems, was no failure, but a savvy ploy from Truman to keep the UN alliance intact, and confront the communist threat in accordance with NSC 68.

Chapter 5: Intelligence Failure Diagnosis and the Korean War

<i>Type</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Characteristic</i>
1	Threat Warning	Threat warning failure by intelligence agencies
2	Threat Response	Leaders' failure to respond effectively to threat warnings, by policy or executive action
3	Opportunity Warning	Failure by intelligence agencies to alert policymakers of opportunities to exploit
4	Opportunity Response	Leaders' failure to effectively exploit opportunities
5	Vulnerability Identification	Failure to recognize one's own vulnerabilities in the context of other actors' intentions and capabilities
6	Vulnerability Amelioration	Failure to ameliorate one's own vulnerabilities

Figure 4: Summary of Intelligence-Related Failure Types and Characteristics.¹

John A. Gentry defines intelligence failure as when a nation "...does not adequately collect and interpret intelligence information, make sound policy based on the intelligence (and other factors), and effectively act."² The former CIA analyst expounds on the roles different actors play within intelligence operations, stating, "Intelligence agencies (with policymakers' inputs) have primary responsibility for identifying issues of policy relevance, collecting and analyzing information, and issuing warnings. Political leaders analyze intelligence information in strategic and domestic political contexts, make decisions under conflicting pressures, and manage policy-implementing agencies..."³ With this as a foundational context, Gentry offers his own analytical approach to categorizing different types of intelligence failures.

As Figure 4 illustrates, Gentry divides intelligence failure into six different types, each with a separate defining characteristic and name. In an effort to offer an additional perspective to

¹ "Table 1," as presented in John A. Gentry, "Intelligence Failure Reframed," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 249, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20203011>.

² *Ibid.*, 248.

³ *Ibid.*

this study, this chapter will apply Gentry's methodology to the analysis of how effectively the DPRK, PRC, USSR, and USA used intelligence in their respective efforts during the Korean conflict. Through this categorization of the types and characteristics of the intelligence failures identified in the preceding chapters, a more thorough understanding of each nation's issues in this sector emerges, and their relative impact on how that particular nation fared in its role in the war.

The analysis of the DPRK's use of intelligence during the Korean War cumulatively identified four major intelligence failures within the events of the NKA invasion of June 1950 and the Chinese intervention of October and November 1950, as well as within overall DPRK strategy for the war. Kim's decision to initiate the invasion accounted for two of these failures, as the North Korean leader went ahead with the assault despite that the Soviet-DPRK war plans contained no contingency plans for an American entry into the conflict, or even that the war would last more than a few days.⁴ That Kim persisted with executing the invasion despite overt warnings from Mao that the U.S. would intervene constitutes an intelligence failure Type 2, "Threat Response," which entails, "Leaders' failure to respond effectively to threat warnings, by policy or executive action."⁵ Failing to plan beyond only a few days into the war represents a Failure Type 6, "Vulnerability Amelioration," which involves "Failure to ameliorate one's own vulnerabilities."⁶ This Type 2 failure can also be seen in Kim and the DPRK's neglect to address

⁴ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155.

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78; John A. Gentry, "Intelligence Failure Reframed," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 249, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20203011>.

⁶ Gentry, 279.

a joint command structure with the PLA before December 1950, and allowing Chinese General Peng to command it, along with access to all DPRK intelligence, once it was finally formalized.⁷ The categorization of all of these North Korean intelligence failures reveals that the culpability for them lies at the executive level, with Kim. The North Korean leader made the decisions based on either a dismissal or misinterpretation, but not an ignorance, of available intelligence.

Mao and the CCP leadership, unlike Kim and his North Korean regime subordinates, correctly predicted the U.S. entry into the Korean conflict. However, Mao's promise to Stalin of PLA support to the NKA, despite little to no indication of the circumstances under, or the extent to which this support might be needed, reflects a failure Type 5, "Vulnerability Identification," which involves the, "Failure to recognize one's own vulnerabilities in the context of other actors' intentions and capabilities."⁸ Further, in a Type 2 failure, Mao's stated reason for eventually sending PLA troops into Korea was based on his poor predictive analysis that the U.S. intended to invade mainland China, contrary to the true intentions as outlined in NSC 81/1. As with the North Korean ineffective use of intelligence, the Chinese intelligence failures stem directly from executive decisions, and Mao bares the blame for their profoundly negative impact on his country.

Little to no doubt can be applied to the assertion that the Soviet Union's use of intelligence in its role in the Korean War is synonymous with Stalin's use thereof. Stalin's

⁷ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 377, 379; Sergei N. Goncharov, John. W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 345-6.

⁸ John A. Gentry, "Intelligence Failure Reframed," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 279, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20203011>.

decision to consent to Kim's NKA invasion of South Korea, based on his misinterpretation of NSC 48, reflects a failure Type 5, "Vulnerability Identification," as the Soviet leader failed to accurately interpret American intentions to intervene in the war on behalf of their ROK ally.⁹ After the Americans did enter into the war, Stalin committed another Type 5 failure in his belief that the Japanese continued to pose a viable military threat to the USSR, and could use the Korean peninsula in conjunction with the United States to invade mainland Asia.¹⁰ Stalin also committed a Type 6 "Vulnerability Amelioration" failure when he allowed Kim to inform Mao of the secret DPRK-Soviet plans for the invasion, inciting Mao's resentment towards Stalin and breeding general mistrust within the communist alliance. Again, as with the Chinese and North Koreans, all of these Soviet intelligence failures are directly attributable to executive action, and thus Stalin's failures are those of his nation.

Although detailed study of U.S. intelligence operations involving the Korean War indicates no definitive failures, examining the alleged mistakes therein seems appropriate in an effort to conduct a balanced comparative analysis of all four countries. U.S. intelligence estimates in the months preceding the NKA invasion of June 1950 generally suggested that the assault across the parallel was possible rather than imminent, which could be construed and argued as an incomplete warning to American policymakers.¹¹ If one accepts such arguments, it

⁹ Christopher Andrew, and Julie Elkner, "Stalin and Foreign Intelligence," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 83., accessed March 10, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca30c076-76e6-4888-b9a7-925342528590%40sessionmgr120&vid=19&hid=104>.

¹⁰ Alexander V. Pantsov, and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 383.

¹¹ Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 69, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=634902&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

would reflect a Type 1 “Threat Warning” failure, which Gentry characterizes as a “Threat warning failure by intelligence agencies.”¹² The other alleged failure involves CIA estimates from the fall of 1950 regarding a Chinese intervention into the war, which deflated PLA troop numbers and refrained from outright warnings of an imminent or ongoing major Chinese military intervention. Again, this would be a Type 1 failure, which alleges a failure on the part of intelligence agencies to adequately warn U.S. leadership of the impending or actual Chinese intervention. Setting aside for now the detailed arguments made in previous chapters rebutting the notion that these were U.S. intelligence failures, a notable difference between the three communist countries and the U.S. emerges. Unlike the DPRK, PRC, and USSR, the U.S. intelligence failures discussed here pin culpability on the intelligence agencies, rather than on mistakes from U.S. leadership. Even provided one proscribes to the argument that U.S. intelligence committed these intelligence failures, Truman and his administration seem to avoid any of the blame.

Gentry’s methodology proves instructive in categorizing the various failures of the four nations subject to this comparative analysis, indicating that the intelligence failures of the three communist nations can be directly attributed to actions of their respective leaders, rather than blamed on the performance of each nations’ intelligence agencies. In contrast, the alleged U.S. intelligence failures cast culpability on only its intelligence agencies for their supposed lack of

¹² John A. Gentry, “Intelligence Failure Reframed,” *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 247, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20203011>.

specificity in warning of the NKA invasion in June 1950, and inaccurate assessments of PLA troop numbers and Chinese intent to intervene in the fall later that year.

Again, forgoing the specific arguments asserted in previous chapters, Gentry's methodology reveals that the three communist nations' use of intelligence stemmed nearly exclusively from their individual leaders' decisions, rather than from a clearly articulated, comprehensive policy derived from a collective consensus of policymakers within the Truman administration. Whereas NSC 68 drove American intelligence just as it did U.S. military, diplomatic, and economic initiatives throughout the Korean War, the three communist nations each relied on one man's ability to incorporate all of the relevant intelligence to form his decisions. It is in this difference in collective versus individual policymaking, it seems, that America's superior use of intelligence relative to that of its communist adversaries might be best explained.

Conclusion

Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time...

—Winston S. Churchill

The ongoing American popular perception that the United States committed significant intelligence failures during Korean War is certainly understandable, especially given that this view continues to persist within the scholarly consensus on the topic. However, historian Richard C. Thornton asserts compelling arguments to the contrary, which, when combined with careful examination of the relevant primary source evidence, helps to unravel how conscious American policy decisions can explain these supposed intelligence failures. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the U.S. use of intelligence during the Korean conflict relative to that of its three communist adversaries—North Korea, China, and Russia—reveals not only that the U.S. did not commit any significant intelligence failures, but leveraged intelligence much more effectively than its primary foes during the North Korean invasion, Chinese intervention, and in the pursuit of strategic goals.

The NKA invasion into South Korea on June 25, 1950 reflected multiple serious intelligence failures, especially on the part of the North Koreans and Soviets. The two nations colluded to form war plans for the invasion which did not include contingencies outside of more than a few days, and more importantly, failed to account for the potential of an American subsequent entry into the war. For his part, Mao had promised Stalin PLA support of the North Koreans, without establishing when, under what circumstances, or to what extent this support

might be required. Stalin gaffed in trusting Kim to remain mum on the Soviet-DPRK plans for the invasion, resulting in Mao's resentment when Kim indirectly informed the Chinese chairman of the impending assault. U.S. intelligence made Truman and his administration well aware of the likelihood of the invasion, and when it occurred, the president implemented the policy of containment as outlined in NSC 68. The American military had been preparing for this event for months, including the former Army commander in Korea conducting a large-scale exercise tailored to a tank invasion, the publication of War Plan SL-17 which specifically addressed a North Korean invasion and a U.S. retreat to and defense of the Pusan perimeter, and an Army-wide emergency preparedness exercised conducted the day prior to the actual invasion. Moreover, primary source evidence indicates that U.S. SIGINT assets, in collaboration with the FBI, successfully broke secret Soviet communication codes in 1948, and that through subsequent intercepts, Truman learned of Stalin's consent to Kim to initiate the invasion.

The Chinese intervention into the Korean conflict in October and November of 1950 reflected Mao's belief that the U.S. intended to invade China via Korea, despite that NSC 81/1 clearly displays American caution to avoid total war with the Chinese. Kim Il Sung allowed the PLA forces to enter and fight in North Korea without establishing a joint PLA-NKA command structure until December 1950, and even then, permitted a Chinese general to command it and maintain open access to North Korean intelligence. Just prior to Mao's final decision to intervene, Stalin betrayed his persistent paranoia of a Japanese military threat to Soviet Russia, despite the severe American restrictions on Japanese military capabilities and a continued U.S. occupation of the island. Although, in the fall of 1950, U.S. intelligence deflated PLA troop numbers and downplayed Chinese intentions to intervene in the war, these actions were at the behest of Truman, who aimed to allay UN allied concerns over Chinese involvement in the war,

and sought to ensure U.S. military engagement with the communist threat as per NSC 68. Moreover, U.S. tactical SIGINT allowed American combat units to effectively locate and engage previously established Chinese positions in North Korea on three separate occasions in October and November of 1950. The U.S. was not only aware of the Chinese intervention, but had leveraged intelligence to engage the PLA in combat.

In terms of achieving overall strategic objectives for the war, the North Koreans utterly failed to reunify the Korean peninsula under communist DPRK control, with the boundary between North and South Korea returning to its original state along the 38th parallel. Kim assumed the Americans would abstain from involvement in the war, and this failure in predictive analysis is reflected most poignantly by the present-day demilitarized zone along this longitudinal line. Mao believed the U.S. aimed to use Korea as a staging point for an invasion of mainland China, and as a result, nearly one million PLA troops perished during the war, and China faced economic isolation for decades. Stalin significantly misjudged or dismissed the second and third-order effects of his consent for Kim to invade South Korea. The result was a persistent U.S. military presence in nearby South Korea, and an enabling of the U.S. to implement NSC 68 and the policy containment. The NKA invasion which Stalin greenlit provided Truman with domestic political capital to ask Congress for the huge increases in U.S. defense expenditures for which NSC 68 called, ensuring the rearmament which would permit the U.S. to maintain its military superiority over the Soviets.

The application of Gentry's intelligence failure methodology to the U.S. and its three communist adversaries reveals that the North Korean, Chinese, and Russian failures stem directly from their individual leaders' actions, while only intelligence agencies bare the blame for supposed U.S. failures. These results suggest that whereas the three communist nations' use

of intelligence derived nearly exclusively from their individual leaders' decisions, the American use of intelligence found its guidance in a clearly articulated, comprehensive policy derived from a collective consensus of policymakers within the Truman administration. Instead of just one man attempting to act on all available intelligence, Truman could turn to NSC 68, a collaborative, vetted policy effort designed to further the strategic objectives of his nation. Perhaps more than any other factor, it is in this difference in the U.S approach to interpretation and leveraging of intelligence that allowed it to avoid the type of intelligence failures its communist allies so consistently committed leading up to and during the Korean War.

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