

Zubok and Pleshakov Notes

Why did Stalin decide to reverse himself and back Kim il Sung's invasion of South Korea?

He wanted to firm up the Soviet alliance with China

Re-division of spheres of influence along ideological lines

Korea had to be captured before Japan could get back on its feet (at which point the US might send more resources to South Korea)

US might not defend South Korea

As of 1949, Soviets have deterrent of the bomb

American officials indicate US won't defend the south; Rhee is South Korea is convinced this is true

Stalin feared "putting the breaks" on the revolutionary process and ceding to Mao revolutionary leadership in Asia

Doing so might tempt the Chinese to exert their power in the region

How did Stalin handle this delicate situation?

He acted as the ideological "pontiff" while also making sure China would shoulder the blame if the scheme went badly.

Stalin boycotts UN to show solidarity with China; didn't expect the US to appeal to the UN when the Korean war began.

North Korean army is pushed back and faced with disintegration – Stalin bears responsibility and his strategy appears on the verge of backfiring

Stalin "passes the buck" to the Chinese – telling them to intervene militarily with "volunteers" under Chinese command

Stalin is determined to avoid war with the US, so he hides the Soviet hand in Korea

Stalin convinces Mao not to worry, the Americans didn't want a major war and would evacuate Korea if it appeared their remaining there would precipitate a major war.

And besides, even if a major war occurred, the Stalin-Mao alliance would defeat the imperialists.

Stalin actually feared such a war, but by reassuring Mao, he reasserted his own status as the "senior partner" and deprived Mao of his strongest argument for not intervening (and thus saving face for Stalin)

Mao's role?

Mao wants to jump into the fray → "military romanticism"

Mao acts in accordance with his anti-American, anti-imperialist views; he believes in the "spiritual superiority" of his troops to those of the imperialists.

BUT – he wants the best deal possible from Stalin and assurances that Stalin will back him militarily – air cover, etc.

Stalin's response?

Very clever. He tells Mao the Soviets, as the ultimate defenders of world socialism, will enter the fray against the imperialists IF world socialism is in jeopardy; however it is the Chinese responsibility to handle regional conflicts (ie Korea)

Stalin will risk a regional defeat in Korea in order to avoid a conflict with the US. He says, "Let the Americans be our neighbors in the far east."

He tells Kim that China and the Soviets are going to hang him out to dry (blaming Mao though the decision is his own)

Mao's counter?

He succumbs and enters the war. Stalin is delighted and informs Kim.

What did Stalin gain? What did he lose?

Solidifies the Sino-Soviet alliance

War of attrition ties down the US in the Far East and makes North Korea and China (who suffer the casualties) more dependent on the USSR

But Stalin's course of action also solidifies US resolve to undermine the Sino-Soviet camp

US signs security treaty with Japan

Hostilities in the Far East speed along anti-Soviet moves in Europe

Germany rearmed

Intensification of CIA subterfuge in Eastern Europe

Bottom line?

Stalin's catastrophe – a giant step backwards from the victory in WWII