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INTRODUCTION

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed sensational developments in the study of the international history of the Cold War—one of the century’s most important events. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, for the first time scholars have been able to study the entire duration of the Cold War from the post–Cold War vantage point. In the meantime, new opportunities to access previously unavailable documents, especially from the Cold War’s “other side,” have allowed scholars to develop new theses and perspectives supported by multiarchival/multisource research. As a result, a “new” Cold War history—to borrow a term from historian John Lewis Gaddis—came into being.¹

The study of China’s Cold War history has made significant progress since the late 1980s. There was a time when China scholars in the West had to travel to Hong Kong or Taiwan, relying upon contemporary newspapers and Western intelligence information, to study Beijing’s policies. Since the mid-1980s, the flowering of the “reform and opening” era in China has resulted in a more flexible political and academic environment compared with Mao’s times, leading to a relaxation of the extremely rigid criteria for releasing party documents. Consequently, a large quantity of fresh and meaningful historical materials, including party documents, former leaders’ works and memoirs, and oral histories, have been made available to Cold War historians. To be sure, with a Communist regime remaining in Beijing (no matter how quasi it actually is today), China still has a long way to go before “free academic inquiry” becomes a reality, but the contribution of China’s documentary opening to the study of the Chinese Cold War experience cannot be underestimated.²

Since the early 1990s, I have traveled to China more than a dozen times to do research, conduct interviews, and attend scholarly conferences. This volume is the product of these trips. In writing this book, I have been directed by two primary purposes. The first is to make new inquiries about China’s Cold War experience using the new documentation. Indeed, this is an everlasting process. If readers compare the five previously published chapters in this volume with their earlier versions, they will find that all have been substantially revised with the support of insights gained from documentation now available. While each chapter in this volume represents an independent case study,
together they form a comprehensive narrative history about China and the Cold War.

My second purpose is to reinterpret a series of fundamental issues crucial to understanding the global Cold War in general and China's Cold War history in particular. My main objectives, concerning three interlocking themes, are to comprehend China's position in the Cold War; to (re)interpret the role ideology played during the period; and to assess Mao's revolution and to analyze Mao's China's patterns of external behavior. I outline these themes below and have tried to integrate them into the narrative of the chapters that follow.

**China's Position in the Cold War**

The Cold War was characterized by the tension between the two contending superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet the position of Mao's China in the Cold War, in many key respects, was not peripheral but central. The observation made by political scientists Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross certainly makes good sense: "During the Cold War, China was the only major country that stood at the intersection of the two superpower camps, a target of influence and enmity for both."³

China's leverage in the Cold War was primarily determined by its enormous size. With the largest population and occupying the third largest territory in the world, China was a factor that neither superpower could ignore. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Mao's China entered a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union, the United States immediately felt seriously threatened. Facing offensives by Communist states and revolutionary/radical nationalist forces in East Asia, Washington, with the creation and implementation of the NSC-68, responded with the most extensive peacetime mobilization of national resources in American history.⁴ In its efforts to "roll back" the Soviet/Communist threat, the United States became involved in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, overextending itself in a global confrontation with the Soviet/Communist camp. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the situation reversed completely following China's split with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with the United States. As a result of having to confront the West and China simultaneously, the Soviet Union overextended its strength, which contributed significantly to the final collapse of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

China's leverage in the Cold War, though, went far beyond changing the balance of power between the two superpowers. The emergence of Mao's China as a unique revolutionary country in the late 1940s (discussed more extensively below) also altered the orientation of the Cold War by shifting its
actual focal point from Europe to East Asia. This shift, as it turned out, would make East Asia the main battlefield of the Cold War, while, at the same time, would help the Cold War to remain “cold.”

When the Chinese Communist revolution achieved nationwide victory in 1949, the global Cold War was at a crucial juncture. Two important events—the 1948–49 Berlin blockade and the Soviet Union’s first successful test of an atomic bomb in August 1949—combined to pose a serious challenge to the two superpowers. If either tried to gain a strategic upper hand against the other—and if a showdown were to occur in Europe, where the dividing line between the two contending camps already had been drawn in a definitive manner—the Cold War could have evolved into a global catastrophe, one that might have involved the use of nuclear weapons. Against this backdrop, Moscow’s vision turned to East Asia.5

In June–August 1949, on the eve of the victory of the Chinese Communist revolution, the number two leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Liu Shaoqi, secretly visited Moscow to meet with Joseph Stalin. The two leaders concluded that a “revolutionary situation” now existed in East Asia. In an agreement on “division of labor” between the Chinese and Soviet Communists for waging the world revolution, they decided that while the Soviet Union would remain the center of international proletarian revolution, China’s primary duty would be the promotion of the “Eastern revolution.”6

The implementation of this agreement resulted in China’s support for Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh and, in October 1950, massive intervention in the Korean War, making Mao’s China a “front-line soldier” fighting against the U.S. imperialists? Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, East Asia continued to be a main focus of the Cold War. While China was playing a central role in the two Taiwan Strait crises and the Vietnam War—the longest “hot” war during the Cold War period—the strategic attention of the United States, following the assumption that China was a more daring enemy than the Soviet Union, became increasingly fixed on East Asia. Ironically, though, the active role China played in East Asia turned this main Cold War battlefield into a strange “buffer” between Washington and Moscow: with China and East Asia in the middle, it was less likely that the United States and the Soviet Union would become involved in a direct military confrontation. The situation would remain like this until the early 1970s, when détente began to redefine the rules of the U.S.–Soviet confrontation, decisively reducing the possibility of a nuclear showdown between the two superpowers.

In terms of its impact on the essence of the Cold War, China’s emergence as a revolutionary country dramatically enhanced the perception of the Cold
War as a battle between “good” and “evil” on both sides, making the conflict more explicitly and extensively framed by ideological perceptions. This was particularly true because, as shall be made clear by a brief comparison of the two Communist countries, Mao’s China was more revolutionary in its behavior than the Soviet Union by the late 1940s.

Taking Marxism-Leninism as the guideline for its state policies, Soviet Russia/the Soviet Union had been a revolutionary country from the time of its establishment. While persistently working to establish a socialist society in Russia, the leaders in Moscow made promoting the proletarian world revolution and overthrowing capitalism’s global reign the Soviet Union’s sacred state mission. However, the situation had changed subtly by the late 1940s. If the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 symbolized Moscow’s retreat from pursuing world proletarian revolution as a state-policy goal, the Soviet-American agreement at Yalta in February 1945 represented the completion of a crucial step in the Soviet Union’s “socialization” process. Although Moscow continued to profess its belief in the Marxist-Leninist theory of international class struggle, the Soviet Union was no longer the same kind of revolutionary country it used to be—isolated and excluded from the existing international system; rather, as a main patron of the postwar world order created at Yalta, Stalin’s Soviet Union was changing into an insider of the big-power club, assuming the identity of a quasi-revolutionary country and a status quo power at the same time. Consequently, as Vojtech Mastny points out, “despite Stalin’s ideological dedication, revolution was for him a means to power rather than a goal in itself.”

Mao’s China was different. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, the Chinese Communist regime was established by breaking up the Yalta system. When the “new China” was born, Mao and the CCP leadership were determined to break with the legacies of the “old” China, to “make a fresh start” in China’s foreign affairs, and to lean to the side of the Soviet-led socialist camp. From its birth date, Mao’s China challenged the Western powers in general and the United States in particular by questioning and, consequently, negating the legitimacy of the “norms of international relations,” which, as Mao and his comrades viewed them, were of Western origins and inimical to revolutionary China. Thus Mao’s China had its own language and theories, its own values and codes of behavior in regard to external policies. The revolutionary features of Chinese foreign policy, combined with the reality that the Cold War’s actual emphasis was then shifting from Europe to East Asia, inevitably caused the global Cold War to entail a more ideological form of warfare as a whole.

China’s emergence as a revolutionary country also created an important
connection between the global Cold War and the decolonization process in non-Western countries, linking the two historical phenomena in ways that would not have been possible without China’s input. Different from the Soviet Union, which was established on the ruins of the czarist Russia, China was a country whose modern history was said to have suffered from the aggression and incursion of Western imperialism/colonialism. Throughout the course of the Chinese revolution, the CCP always viewed China’s national independence and national liberation as the revolution’s key mission. In the late 1940s, Mao introduced his “intermediate zone” theory, claiming that between the United States and the Soviet Union existed a vast “intermediate zone” mainly composed of “oppressed” non-Western countries, including China. Before U.S. imperialists could attack the Soviet Union, according to Mao, they first had to control the intermediate zone, thus making Asia the central arena of the Cold War. When Mao and the CCP seized political power in China, they immediately proclaimed that revolutionary China, as a natural ally of the “oppressed peoples” in the intermediate zone, would hold high the banner of anti-imperialism and anticolonialism, challenging the United States and other Western imperialist/colonial powers. Mao and his comrades regarded this stance as important both for defending the socialist camp and for promoting Communist/radical nationalist revolutions in non-Western countries. Thus Mao’s China dramatically enhanced the theme of decolonization in the Communist Cold War discourse that had been overwhelmingly dominated by class-struggle-centered language. As a result, the emerging anti-imperialist/anticolonialist movements in non-Western countries became more tightly connected with the “proletarian world revolution.”

By emphasizing the importance of the role played by Mao’s China in the Cold War, I do not mean to argue that China’s overall position was more important than that of the Soviet Union or the United States. Although China was a major Cold War actor, its capacity and will to influence global issues and international affairs were inevitably compromised by the fact that it was backward in technology and economic development. In addition, its foreign behavior was profoundly restricted by a Chinese ethnocentrism, which was deeply rooted in its history and culture. Therefore, in the Cold War’s global framework, China played an important role only in certain dimensions (especially those with close connections to East Asia or in China itself), and it was the Soviet Union and the United States that occupied the indisputable central position. Yet, as John Gaddis points out, “The diversification of power did more to shape the course of the Cold War than did the balancing of power.” Indeed, the complexity and singularity of the Cold War were determined by
its multipolarity and multidimensionality, which came into being with each and every actor leaving its stamp on them. In this sense, China’s position in the Cold War is clearly important.

**Ideology Matters**

The Cold War was from the beginning a confrontation between two contending ideologies—communism and liberal capitalism. The compositions of the two Cold War camps were defined along ideological lines, and the conflict between them, at its core, represented not only a contest to determine which side was stronger but also, and more importantly, a competition to demonstrate which side was superior. The Cold War did not end as the result of the Soviet empire suffering economic collapse or military defeat at the hands of Western countries; rather, it happened in the wake of the “inner surrender” by the people in the Soviet Union and East European Communist countries to the superiority of liberal capitalism and Western democracy.

However, throughout the Cold War period, a majority of political scientists and diplomatic historians played down ideology as an essential agent in determining the basic orientation of a nation’s foreign policy. From “traditionalists/realisitsts” to “postrevisionists,” theorists and diplomatic historians differed on many issues, but they had one thing in common: by defining “power” basically in material terms, they did not take the power of ideas seriously.¹⁴ A prevailing assumption among scholars was that although the two contending camps used strong ideological language to attack each other and defend themselves, they did so more to justify already existing policies than to shape decisions yet to be made. Scholars also believe that what mattered was state leaders’ concerns over, as well as calculations about, their nation’s “vital security interests,” rather than their “superficial” ideological commitments.

Within this context, a “China under threat” approach dominated the study of China’s Cold War history, until recently. Many scholars assumed that the key to understanding China’s external policy lay in a comprehension of Beijing’s “security concerns,” which, as in any other country, could be defined in terms of its physical safety, its economic development, and its political and societal stability, as well as its perception of external threats.¹⁵

All of these assumptions are now being challenged. Indeed, one of the most important revelations of the “new” Cold War history is that ideology mattered. To make this assertion more accurate, I will further argue that ideology not only played a decisive role in bringing Communist countries together but also contributed to driving them apart.

During the early phase of the Cold War, a shared belief in Marxist-Leninist
ideology served as a central force to unite Communist states and parties in the world. After World War II, when national identity consciousness was stronger than ever before, this force did not produce a monolithic international Communist movement with Moscow as its supreme headquarters; but it did create, and in turn was enhanced by, a profound conviction among Communists all over the world that "history is on our side," thus allowing them to pose a serious challenge to international capitalism, while, at the same time, constructing the moral foundation on which the "socialist camp" was established. It should also be pointed out that, forty years later, the final collapse of this conviction led to the dismantling of the socialist camp and, in the wake of that, the end of the Cold War.

As far as the external policies of Mao's China are concerned, the role played by ideology is evident. The CCP leadership adopted the "lean-to-one-side" approach when it established the People's Republic of China (PRC), which, in a practical political sense, meant allying China with the Soviet Union as well as other socialist countries and confronting the Western "imperialist powers." In October 1950, only one year after the Communists seized power in China, the CCP leadership decided to enter the Korean War. In a series of internal discussions and correspondence, Mao used highly ideological language to argue that if China failed to intervene, the "Eastern revolution" and the world revolution would suffer. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Beijing's foreign policy consistently demonstrated a strong ideological color. For example, in October 1956, the CCP leadership urged Moscow to suppress the "reactionary rebellion" in Hungary for the sake of the international Communist movement. In the mid-1960s, Beijing, under the banner of fulfilling China's duties of "proletarian internationalism," provided Vietnamese Communists with substantial support, including the dispatch of 320,000 Chinese engineering and anti-aircraft troops to North Vietnam in 1965-69. All of these developments clearly suggest that the role of ideology in Beijing's external policies cannot be overlooked.

In a deeper sense, ideology's impact upon China's Cold War experience is reflected in Mao's "continuous revolution" as his central theme in shaping Chinese foreign policy and security strategy. Mao's revolution never took as its ultimate goal the Communist seizure of power in China; rather, as the chairman repeatedly made clear, his revolution aimed at transforming China's state, population, and society, and simultaneously reasserting China's central position in the world. The domestic and international goals of the revolution were deeply connected. On the one hand, it was precisely by virtue of the revolution's domestic mission that the revolution's international aim became justi-
fied; on the other hand, the international aspect of the revolution served as a constant source of domestic mobilization, helping to legitimize the revolution at home and to maintain its momentum. Mao’s and his comrades’ belief in Marxist-Leninist ideology was always interwoven with their devotion to using ideology as a means to transform China’s state, its society, and its international outlook. This belief stood at the core of their conceptual realm, providing legitimacy to the Chinese Communist revolution.

It is here we see the complicated interplay between the Mao generation’s conversion to Communist ideology and its continuous exposure to the influence of China’s age-old history and culture. At a glance, the two experiences are contradictory. As twentieth-century revolutionaries, Mao and his comrades were highly critical of the Chinese past, declaring that their revolution would render a thorough transformation of China’s “old” state, society, and culture. But when Mao and his comrades were posing challenges to the Chinese past, the ideology on which they depended as the lodestar and guiding philosophy for the transformation had to be articulated through the discourse, symbols, norms, and identities that had been a part of the Chinese past. Consequently, a profound continuity existed between the Mao generation’s revolutionary behavior and the “old” China they meant to destroy. In this regard, a conspicuous example is the impact that the age-old “Central Kingdom” mentality had on Mao and his comrades. Their aspiration for promoting a world proletarian revolution by following the model of China revealed unmistakably how deeply their conceptual realm had been penetrated by that mentality.

The message delivered here is of broad theoretical significance: in a cross-cultural environment, the creation, transmission, and representation of an ideological belief must be subjected to the definition and interpretation of the discourse, symbols, norms, and values that formed a particular actor’s historically/culturally bound conceptual lens. The outcome of the process could lead either to convergence or to divergence between actors with the same ideological belief. Consequently, ideology, like religious faith, could either bring people together or split them apart, and, in certain circumstances, even cause them to engage in deadly confrontations with one another. Indeed, have we not witnessed enough examples of conflicts and wars between different sects within the same religion in world history?

A fundamental flaw of the “old” Cold War history lay in scholars’ inability to comprehend this complicated dual function of ideology. As a result of an oversimplified “ideology versus national security interest” dichotomy, a prevailing assumption was that if countries with shared ideological beliefs (such as China and the Soviet Union) were to disagree, then that shared faith must have
been overwhelmed by a conflict in national interests. In the study of China’s Cold War history, scholars have often used Beijing’s split with Moscow and rapprochement with Washington to prove this assumption.

Careful study of the history of Sino-Soviet relations demonstrates that the split was not caused by uncompromising conflicts in national interests but rather by different understandings and interpretations of the same ideology. When serious disagreements began to emerge between Beijing and Moscow in the mid- and late 1950s, China and the Soviet Union had more shared “national interests” than ever: given the hostility of the United States and other Western countries toward the PRC, Beijing’s strategic alliance with Moscow served China’s national security needs well; the Western economic embargo against China made Sino-Soviet trade relations ever more valuable for Beijing; and China’s economic reconstruction benefited greatly from Soviet aid. In turn, China’s support significantly enhanced the Soviet Union’s position in a global confrontation with the United States. The national interests of China and the Soviet Union were highly compatible at that time, or at least should have greatly outweighed any explicit or implicit conflict that might have existed between them.

But it was exactly at such a moment that conflicts between Beijing and Moscow surfaced. As demonstrated by discussions in Chapter 3, the key to the conflicts lay in Mao’s changing perceptions of China’s relations with the Soviet Union. After Stalin’s death, Mao increasingly perceived the CCP, and himself in particular, as qualified to claim centrality in the international Communist movement. In its criticism of Moscow’s “big-power chauvinism” and the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization effort, Maoist discourse was dominated by metaphors, myths, and symbols crucial to the promotion of Mao’s continuous revolution, which also caused Beijing’s deepening discord with Moscow. All of these developments served as the prelude to the great Sino-Soviet polemic debate in the 1960s, eventually leading to each of the Communist giants to regard the other as a “traitor” to true Marxism-Leninism. Following the intensifying ideological warfare, the state-to-state relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated substantially, causing sharp conflict in their “national security interests.” It was the deepening discrepancy over how to define/interpret the same ideology, rather than conflict over national security interests, that should be identified as the primary cause for the Sino-Soviet split.

Ideology matters, yet not without fundamental limits. As indicated by China’s Cold War experience, while ideology was central in legitimizing important foreign policy decisions, ideological terms alone could not guarantee
“legitimacy.” Thus Mao and his comrades always tried to present important foreign policy decisions in terms of both ideological and other concerns. For example, when Beijing’s leaders decided to enter the Korean War, they announced to the Chinese people and the whole world that if they did not participate China’s security interests would be seriously jeopardized. In the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958, Mao argued that shelling Jinmen was necessary to prevent the U.S. imperialists from permanently separating Taiwan from the socialist motherland. In these cases, security concerns were real, but they also helped justify decisions made primarily based on the leadership’s ideological commitments.

Ideology’s role also withers along with the ideology’s declining “inner” support from the people—this was particularly true in the case of communism. As a utopian vision, communism was most beautiful when it was not a political philosophy in action. When Communist ideology was put into practice in a favorable historical/social environment—such as in twentieth-century China, where radical revolutions had accumulated tremendous momentum and strength—it ignited popular enthusiasm and support. But when communism repeatedly failed the test of people’s lived experience with its inability to turn the utopian vision into reality, popular enthusiasm and support eventually died. In Mao’s China, Maoist continuous-revolution programs such as the “Great Leap Forward” and the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” suffered this fate. Consequently, ideology would no longer be able to legitimate Chinese Communist policies—which was in itself a sign that the Chinese Communist regime was losing its legitimacy.

**Mao and Foreign Policy Patterns of Mao’s China**

In any historical study, scholars must pay special attention to the role of personalities, and it is imperative in a study about Mao’s China. As revealed in the chapters that follow, Mao was CCP/PRC’s single most important policy-maker. Behind every crucial decision—such as China’s intervention in Korea, its alliance and split with the Soviet Union, its shelling of Jinmen, its support to the Vietnamese Communists, and its rapprochement with the United States—Mao always was the central figure. In order to understand the dynamics and logic of the PRC’s revolutionary foreign policy, one must comprehend Mao’s concept of continuous revolution. Underlying the concept was Mao’s “post-revolution anxiety,” a psychological/conceptual force constantly pushing him to persist in a revolutionary agenda for China’s domestic and external policies.

As discussed earlier, Mao’s revolution aimed to transform China’s “old”
state and society as well as to destroy the “old” world. Mao never concealed his ambition that his revolution would finally turn China into a land of universal justice and equality and that the Chinese revolution would serve as a model and revive China’s central position in the world. China’s domestic and external policies thus were deeply interrelated.

When the CCP seized power in 1949, Mao claimed that this event was only “the completion of the first step in the long march of the Chinese revolution,” and that carrying out the “revolution after the revolution” was for the CCP a task more complicated and challenging. How to prevent the continuous revolution from losing momentum emerged as one of Mao’s major concerns. Around 1956, as the nationwide “socialist transformation” (e.g., nationalizing industry and commerce and collectivizing agriculture) was nearly completed, Mao’s concerns changed into worries because he sensed that many of the party’s cadres and ordinary members were becoming less interested in deepening the continuous revolution. After the failure of the Great Leap Forward in 1958–60, Mao realized that even among the Communist elite, his revolution was losing crucial “inner support.” As Mao approached the last decade of his life, he found that in pursuing the ideals he cherished he had become a “lone monk with a leaky umbrella,” and a majority of the Communist elite were unable—or unwilling—to follow the development of his thinking. A pivotal challenge obsessed Mao constantly: through what means could he transform China and the world? Even with his seemingly unrestricted political power, he often found himself powerless. What he encountered was a paradox sitting deeply in the challenge itself: he had to find the means needed for transforming the “old” world from the very “old” world that was yet to be transformed. Throughout Mao’s twenty-seven-year reign in China, he was never able to overcome this profound anxiety.

In order to maintain the momentum of his continuous revolution, Mao needed to find the means to mobilize the masses. It was in the process of searching for such means that he realized that the adoption of a revolutionary foreign policy had great relevance. As indicated in the chapters ahead on Beijing’s management of the Korean War, the Taiwan Strait crisis, and the Vietnam War, during the early years of the PRC, a revolutionary foreign policy helped to make Mao’s various state and societal transformation programs powerful unifying and national themes supplanting many local, regional, or factional concerns. When tension between Mao and other members of the Communist elite, as well as between the Communist regime and China’s ordinary people, intensified following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, a
revolutionary foreign policy further served as an effective—and probably the only available—way through which Mao could enhance both his authority and the legitimacy of his continuous revolution.

The role of revolutionary foreign policy in Mao's continuous revolution must be understood in the context of the Chinese people's "victim mentality" and its connections to the age-old Central Kingdom concept so important in China's history and culture. During modern times, the Chinese people's perception of their nation's position in the world was continuously informed by a conviction that political incursion, economic exploitation, and military aggression by foreign imperialist countries had undermined the historical glory of the Chinese civilization and humiliated the Chinese nation. Consequently, a victim mentality gradually dominated the Chinese conceptualization of its relations with the outside world.

Indeed, this mentality is extraordinary. While it is common for non-Western countries to identify themselves as victims of the Western-dominated worldwide course of modernization, the Chinese perception of their nation being a victimized member of the international community is unique, because it formed such a sharp contrast with the long-lived Central Kingdom concept. The Chinese thus felt that their nation's modern experience was more humiliating and less tolerable than that of any other victimized non-Western country in the world, and they firmly believed that China's victim status would not end until its weaknesses had been turned into strength. So they willingly embraced Mao's revolutionary programs aimed at reviving China's central position in the world.

The central role China's foreign policy played in Mao's revolution drove the CCP leadership to adopt a highly centralized decision-making structure in external affairs. The political institutions of Mao's China were characterized by tight central control; but the control over foreign policymaking certainly was the tightest. As early as August 1944, when the CCP Central Committee issued the first comprehensive inner-party directive on diplomatic affairs, Mao made it clear that party organs and cadres must not take action in diplomatic affairs without Central Committee authorization.22 On the eve of Communist seizure of power, Mao stressed that "there existed no insignificant matter in diplomatic affairs, and everything should be reported to and decided by the Central Committee."23 After the PRC's establishment, Mao further confirmed that the politburo, the Central Secretariat, and, indeed, Mao himself, controlled the decision-making power. The missions of the Foreign Ministry, headed by Premier Zhou Enlai from 1949 to 1958, were defined as keeping
the central leadership well informed of China's external situation and carrying out the central leadership's decisions. Under these circumstances, even Zhou Enlai became more a policy carrier than a policymaker. During the Cultural Revolution years, this highly centralized foreign policy structure became more rigid when Foreign Minister Chen Yi lost virtually all power. For a time even the politburo did not matter, since the real power fell into the hands of the "Cultural Revolution Group," the institutional instrument Mao created to implement the Cultural Revolution.

Because of Mao's perception of the Chinese revolution's sacred mission, which was reinforced by the Chinese victim mentality, he and his comrades were filled with an exceptional sense of insecurity throughout the twenty-seven years he ruled China. In general, it is understandable that, in the divided Cold War world in which peace and stability had been severely threatened by factors such as the emergence of nuclear weapons and the intensifying confrontation between the two superpowers, any country would feel less secure than ever before. Mao's sense of insecurity, however, was special in several respects.

First, the ambitious hope on the part of Mao and the CCP leadership to change China into a central international actor conflicted with China's power status, which was still weak during the Maoist era. As long as Mao and his comrades were determined to chart their own course in the world and to make China a prominent world power, they would continue to feel insecure until China's weakness had been turned into strength.

Second, since Mao and the CCP leadership emphasized the central role the Chinese revolution was to play in promoting the worldwide proletarian revolution, thus making China the primary enemy of world reactionary forces, they logically felt that they faced a very threatening world. The more Mao and his comrades stressed the significance of the Chinese revolution, the less secure they would feel in face of perceived threats from the outside world.

Third, Mao made this insecurity more serious when he highlighted international tension and treated it as a useful tool for domestic mobilization. Through anti-foreign-imperialist propaganda, Mao and his comrades used foreign threats to mobilize the Chinese masses. This propaganda, in turn, would inevitably cause a deepening sense of insecurity on the part of Mao and his comrades.

Hence, in the practical process of policymaking, Beijing broadly defined the threats to China's national security interests. Compared with policymakers in other countries, Beijing's leaders in the Maoist era were under great pressure
to take extraordinary steps to defend and promote revolutionary China's security interests. This explains to a large extent why the PRC frequently resorted to violence in dealing with foreign policy crises.27

Because of the domestic mobilization function Mao attached to China's external policies, Beijing's use of force during the Maoist period was characterized by three distinctive and consistent patterns. First, Beijing's leaders resorted to force only when the confrontation was in one way or another related to China's territorial integrity and physical security. Even when China's purpose in entering a military confrontation was broader than the simple defense of its border (such as during the Korean War), Beijing's leaders always emphasized that they had exercised the military option because China's physical security was in jeopardy.28 When China's involvement in a military confrontation resulted in its occupation of foreign territory, such as during the Chinese-Indian border war of 1962, Beijing's leaders ordered a retreat in order to prove that China's war aims were no more than the defense of China's borders.

Second, Beijing's leaders used force always for the purpose of domestic mobilization. Mao and his comrades fully understood that the tension created by an international crisis provided them with the best means to call the whole nation to act in accordance with the will and terms of the CCP. This was particularly true when Mao met with difficulty in pushing the party and the nation to carry out his continuous-revolution programs. As shown in Chapter 7, Mao's decision to shell Kinmen in the summer of 1958 was closely related to a nationwide wave of mass mobilization, which made it possible for the Great Leap Forward to reach a high point. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, as discussed in Chapter 8, China's involvement in the Vietnam War and the extensive mass mobilization that accompanied it created an atmosphere conducive to the rapid radicalization of China's political and social life.

Third, Beijing's leaders used force only when they believed that they were in a position to justify it in a "moral" sense. If they did not morally justify their actions, the mobilization effect they hoped to achieve would be compromised. During the Korean War, the Beijing leadership's public war aims, "Defend our nation! Defend our home!" and "Defeat American arrogance!" were established as central mobilization slogans. During China's involvement in the Vietnam War, Mao compared the relationship between Vietnam and China to that between "lips and teeth," emphasizing that China had an obligation to proletarian internationalism to support the just struggle of the Vietnamese people. "Justice," indeed, became the talisman of China's international military involvement during the Cold War.
China’s external behavior during the Maoist era was a contradictory phenomenon. Despite its tendency toward using force, Mao’s China was not an expansionist power. It is essential to make a distinction between the pursuit of centrality and the pursuit of dominance in international affairs in terms of the fundamental goal of Chinese foreign policy. While Mao and his comrades were never shy about using force in pursuing China’s foreign policy goals, what they hoped to achieve was not the expansion of China’s political and military control of foreign territory or resources—which was, for Mao and his comrades, too inferior an aim—but, rather, the spread of their influence to other “hearts and minds” around the world. Mao fully understood that only when China’s superior moral position in the world had been recognized by other peoples would the consolidation of his continuous revolution’s momentum at home be assured.

A Brief Note on Sources
The studies in this volume are supported by fresh Chinese sources made available in recent years. They include collections of party documents and leaders’ papers, memoirs and diaries by those who were involved in China’s Cold War decision making or implementation, scholarly articles and monographs by Chinese researchers and research institutions with less restricted archival access, official and semiofficial publications using classified documents, and oral history interviews. On a limited scale, these studies also have used documents obtained from Beijing’s CCP Central Archives and various provincial and regional archives (including Xinjiang, Jilin, Guangxi, Fujian, and Shanghai). While these new sources are valuable in the sense that they have created previously nonexistent research opportunities, it is also clear that they were made available to scholars on a selective basis and, sometimes, by a desire other than to have the truth known. Fully realizing the limitations that restricted access to original historical documentation places on this study, I have tried to treat my sources critically. In particular, I have made every effort to double-check information provided by these sources, and, whenever necessary, in the notes I identify dubious sources or discrepancies in sources.

In the introduction to his acclaimed study on the international history of the Korean War, renowned Cold War historian William Stueck confesses that in completing his book he was dominated by “a feeling of humility over the realization of how little I know about the Korean War, of how much remains to be done by those who will follow me.” I am feeling even more humble. Much about Mao’s China is yet to be studied. I plan to continue my schol-
any endeavor by conducting a more comprehensive study on how Mao's China encountered the world. To what extent the new project will be successful will depend, again, upon further opening of Chinese archival sources. Indeed, only when scholars—both Chinese and non-Chinese—are able to conduct free academic inquiries with the support of unrestricted archival access will more authentic and a deeper understanding about China become possible.
CHAPTER 4
CHINA’S STRATEGIES TO END THE KOREAN WAR, 1950–1953

Resist America! Assist Korea!
Defend our nation! Defend our home!
Beat American Arrogance!
—Chinese slogans during the Korean War

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

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

This chapter offers a critical review of the changing Chinese Communist strategies to end the Korean War. It first analyzes the implications of the Korean crisis for Beijing and the perceptions pertinent to and the goals pursued in Beijing’s management of the war. It then presents a discussion of
how Beijing’s aims in Korea changed during the process of its intervention and, accordingly, how the strategies designed to serve these aims had to be adjusted and reallocated. The central assumption is that three related factors shaped Beijing’s perceptions and management of the changing course of the Korean crisis: the Chinese Communist leaders’ overall domestic and international concerns, the Communist versus the U.S.’s/UN’s strategies to end the war, and Beijing’s perceptions of its needs and those of Moscow and Pyongyang in Korea.

**Implications of the Korean Crisis in Beijing’s Eyes**

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

On the other hand, the Korean crisis offered the CCP leadership potential opportunities. In evaluating how the Korean crisis might influence China, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders could clearly sense that by firmly and successfully confronting the “U.S. imperialist aggression” in Korea and Taiwan, they would be able to translate the tremendous pressure from without into dynamics that would help enhance the Chinese people’s revolutionary momentum while legitimizing the CCP’s authority as China’s new ruler. This would help establish the foundation for Mao’s grand plans to transform China’s old state and society into a new socialist country.⁷ And, although the Korean crisis challenged the international structure in the Asian-Pacific region, one of the main objectives of Communist China’s foreign policy was to pound at the Western-dominated existing international order, and Beijing’s leaders realized that a North Korean victory (preferably, with China’s support) could help establish
a new order in East Asia. From Beijing’s perspective, even an expansion of the conflict in Korea, certainly not desirable, might not be intolerable. The relationship between the CCP and the North Korean Communists had been complex. Kim Il-sung, while endeavoring to maintain cooperation with his Chinese comrades, was vigilant against Chinese influence. To Mao and the CCP leadership, expanding warfare in Korea would inevitably menace China’s national security interests, but, at the same time, it could offer the Chinese Communists a possible opportunity to expand the influence of the Chinese revolution into an area at the top of the CCP’s Asian revolutionary agenda. From the beginning, Mao and the CCP leadership viewed the Korean War with mixed feelings: failure to eject the Americans from Korea would create insecurity for China; success in defeating the Americans, especially with China’s help, would advance revolutionary China’s domestic mobilization and international reputation and influence.

**Setting the Stage for Entering the War**

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

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

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

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

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

Beijing made the decision to send troops to Korea in the first three weeks of October. The process leading to the decision was complex. Top Chinese leaders were under intense pressure because of cruel domestic and international conditions, and the party leadership was divided on the necessity of entering the fighting. Further, although Stalin pushed the Chinese to enter the war "to give our Korean comrades an opportunity to organize combat reserves under the cover of your troops," he failed to clarify what military support Moscow would give Beijing if the Chinese did send troops to Korea.
Under these circumstances, members of the CCP Central Secretariat met on 2 October to discuss the Korean crisis and made the preliminary decision to send Chinese troops to Korea. Mao then personally drafted a telegram to Stalin to inform the Soviet leader that Beijing had decided “to send a portion of our troops” to Korea and to request major Soviet air support. However, because top CCP leaders were yet to reach a consensus on intervention and Mao hoped to strengthen China’s bargaining position in getting Soviet air support, he probably did not dispatch this telegram. Instead, he met with Soviet ambassador N. V. Rochshin, asking him to inform Stalin that, since many leaders in Beijing believed that China should “show caution” in entering the war, the CCP leadership had not made the decision to send troops to Korea.

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

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

Mao justified his decision by reemphasizing that it was in China’s fundamental interests to pursue a victory over the United States in Korea. In his correspondences with Stalin and his speeches to the CCP leadership, the chairman stated that the Chinese troops should enter the war to “resolve the Korean problem,” that is, to “eliminate the invaders from the United States and from other countries, and [thus] drive them out [of Korea].” He linked the “settlement of the Korean problem” with China and the “whole East,” emphasizing that China’s entry into the war would strengthen the CCP’s control of China’s
state and society and serve to promote an Eastern revolution following the
Chinese model.35

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

Refusing to Negotiate: The Pursuit of a Total Victory

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

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

The Chinese military victory in Korea put Beijing’s leaders in a favor-
able position to conclude the war through negotiations, if they so desired. On
5 December, thirteen non-Western countries headed by India handed a peace
proposal to Beijing. They suggested that the Chinese stop their offensive at
the 38th parallel and that, on the basis of a cease-fire, a meeting of the big
powers with interests in Korea would be convened to discuss the final solution
of the crisis.40 Nine days later, the UN passed the thirteen-nation resolution
and established a three-person group to seek a “basis on which a satisfactory
ceasefire in Korea could be arranged.”41 In order to persuade Beijing that a
cease-fire was in its interests, the Indians repeatedly promised the Chinese that
the thirteen-country proposal did not originate in the West, and that in exchange for Beijing’s acceptance of a cease-fire, other Chinese interests would be taken into account.42

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

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

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

On the last day of 1950, Chinese troops began a third offensive campaign, and UN forces continued to retreat. Seoul fell to Chinese and North Korean troops on 4 January 1951. By 8 January, advance Chinese/North Korean units had reached the 37th parallel. Peng reported to Beijing that the third Chinese offensive campaign in Korea was victorious.50
On 11 January, the UN’s three-person cease-fire group suggested five principles for resolving the Korean conflict, among which the most important were an immediate cease-fire in Korea, the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea, and a meeting of the four powers (the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, and China) to settle outstanding Far East problems, and at which both the Taiwan issue and the PRC’s representation in the UN would be discussed.51

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

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

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

Underlying Beijing’s inflexible attitude were several crucial assumptions. First of all, Mao believed that the Chinese/North Korean troops still held the upper hand on the battlefield. Although Peng and other Chinese field commanders in Korea found it difficult for their troops to advance farther south, Mao had a different view. Basing his observations of the Korean conflict on his experience in China’s civil war, the CCP chairman believed that the Chinese troops, by outnumbering the enemy forces and maintaining higher morale,
could expand their gains. In a telegram to Peng on 14 January, Mao wrote of the two possibilities he foresaw in the future movement of U.S./UN forces in Korea: “(1) Under pressures from the great Chinese-Korean forces, [the enemy] may retreat from South Korea after a symbolic resistance. . . . (2) The enemy may resist stubbornly in Taegu and Pusan but will finally retreat from Korea after we have exhausted their potential.”

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

Top Chinese leaders in Beijing, realizing the necessity of coordinating Beijing’s position with North Korea’s, sent two telegrams to Kim II-sung on 14 January to clarify Beijing’s official stand and to explain Chinese military
strategy in Korea. In a highly publicized memo, sent in the name of the Chinese government, Beijing emphasized that an immediate cease-fire was unacceptable for the Communist side. Only when the U.S./UN side had agreed to such important conditions as withdrawing all foreign troops from Korea, settling the Taiwan question, and addressing other important Far Eastern issues would Beijing agree to negotiate.\textsuperscript{60} In another telegram sent to Kim Il-sung via Peng Dehuai, the CCP chairman pointed out that the Chinese forces “must be well prepared” before they could be put into another offensive campaign, otherwise they would “recommit the mistakes the Korean troops had committed in June–September 1950.”\textsuperscript{61} The North Koreans now had to yield to the Chinese position, and they gave their consent when Kim Il-sung met with Peng Dehuai on 16–18 January.\textsuperscript{62} The next day, Mao instructed the CPV commanders in Korea to demonstrate “a whole-hearted respect” for the North Korean people, government, party, and, particularly, “the Korean people’s leader, Comrade Kim Il-sung.”\textsuperscript{63} On 17 January, Zhou Enlai rejected the three-person group’s ceasefire proposal.

In a deeper sense, Mao’s pursuit of a total victory in Korea must be understood in the context of his desire to use the victory to push forward the political mobilization of the Chinese people on the CCP’s terms. China’s entry into the Korean War, as Mao had expected, triggered a new wave of patriotism and revolutionary nationalism among the Chinese people. The propaganda related to “The Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea” quickly went beyond the original focus of “safeguarding our homes and defending our motherland,” entering a new stage in which the emphasis was the Communist leadership’s contribution to the creation of a powerful and prestigious “new China.” Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders clearly felt that continuous Communist victories on the Korean battlefield would broaden and deepen this movement. On 2 February, the CCP Central Committee issued “Instructions on Promoting the Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea among All Walks in the Country.” The document called upon the whole party and the entire country to echo the CPV’s victories in Korea by bringing the “Great Patriotic Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea” to deeper levels. It particularly emphasized that the movement should be directed to “raise the contempt and hatred of the U.S. imperialists” while “encouraging [Chinese people’s] national self-confidence and self-respect.” Beijing’s leaders hoped that by allowing this movement to penetrate into every cell of Chinese society it would result in the Chinese people’s innermost acceptance of “the leadership of Chairman Mao, the People’s Government, and the Chinese Communist Party.”\textsuperscript{64} Two weeks later, an enlarged CCP politburo meeting reempha-
sized Mao’s view of the importance of making the “Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea” a nationwide endeavor, so that everyone in China would be “reeducated” through their participation. Beijing clearly did not welcome a cease-fire at this moment.

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

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

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

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

Kim Il-sung, however, hoped to maintain the Communist offensive. In a letter to Peng Dehuai on 30 May, Kim emphasized that “certainly we may predict that the Korean problem cannot be solved in peaceful ways, and that the war will not end at the 38th parallel. In view of this, my opinion is that we should prolong our military offensive, and should continue to attack the enemy.” In order to coordinate the strategy between the Chinese and North Koreans, the Chinese leaders invited Kim Il-sung to visit Beijing in early June. Chinese and Russian sources now available do not offer detailed coverage of the discussions between Mao and Kim, but evidence indicates that because Kim was unwilling to accept China’s new position, it was difficult for the two parties to reach a consensus. Kim argued that the Chinese/North Korean forces still held a superior position on the battlefield and that it would be better if they put the negotiation option on hold until more enemy forces were annihilated. Mao, however, emphasized that if the negotiations would include conditions...
such as the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea and the settlement of the Korean question, the Chinese/North Korean side had no reason not to come to the negotiation table.\textsuperscript{80} Since the Chinese troops were the main combat force in Korea and Kim himself had no strength to fight the UN forces independently, he had to yield to the new Chinese strategy.\textsuperscript{81} Consequently, Mao and Kim agreed that they would start formal negotiations with the Americans to stop the war at the 38th parallel, and that, at the very least, Chinese/North Korean forces would not start another strategic offensive in the coming two months.\textsuperscript{82}

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

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

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

**Defining China’s Negotiation Strategies**

Negotiating with the Americans was a new challenge for Beijing’s leaders. From 1944 to 1946, the Chinese Communists had been engaged in a series of contacts with the Americans during the CCP-Nationalist talks for averting the civil war, but that experience did not involve direct negotiations between the CCP and the United States. To guarantee Beijing’s direct control of the negotiation process, top CCP leaders acted immediately to organize China’s negotiation team. Generals Deng Hua and Xie Fang of the CPV and General Nam II of the KPA would lead the Chinese/North Korean negotiators; but a behind-the-scenes “negotiation direction group” was formed to guarantee that the negotiations “follow[ed] correct strategies and tactics.” Li Kenong, vice foreign minister and the CCP’s longtime military intelligence head, and Qiao Guanhua, head of the Foreign Ministry’s International Information Bureau who had had extensive experiences in dealing with the Americans in the 1940s, were assigned to lead the group. Before Li and Qiao left Beijing, Mao had a long conversation with them, emphasizing that they should treat the coming negotiations as a “political battle” and should always follow the policy lines formulated in Beijing. Mao also instructed them to maintain daily telegraphic communications with Beijing’s top leaders. This group arrived at Kim Il-sung’s headquarters early on 6 July, and the North Koreans agreed that the negotiations would be directed by this group, with Li as the “team head” and Qiao as the “director.”
Beijing's other main concern was how to justify to the Chinese people the new strategy of ending the war. On 3 July, the CCP Central Committee issued "Instructions on the Propaganda Affairs Concerning the Peace Negotiations in Korea." The CCP leadership stated that "we have always favored settling the Korean problem through peaceful means, and that peace has been the very purpose of the CPV's participation in the anti-aggression war in Korea." The document then pointed out that the "War of Resisting America and Assisting Korea" had succeeded in the past eight months not only in "defending the security of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and PRO," but also in "forcing the Americans to give up their original plans of aggression and to acknowledge the Chinese people's strength." It was the Americans, the CCP leadership emphasized, who solicited negotiation and an armistice. Whether or not the negotiation would lead to peace, the CCP leadership alleged, the political initiative was already firmly in Beijing's control.95

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

Underlying Beijing's assumption that the negotiation process would be brief was the belief that the Chinese/North Korean forces still held a superior position on the battlefield. Although the Chinese setbacks in the fifth campaign had convinced both Beijing's leaders and the Chinese field commanders that it was impossible for China to achieve a total military victory in Korea, they believed that the conflict of the past eight months would have taught the Americans that a UN victory was equally impossible.98 Furthermore, Beijing's leaders assumed that their conditions for an armistice—the restoration of the prewar status, that is, the forces of both sides returning to the 38th parallel—would be acceptable to (if not necessarily welcomed by) the Americans. Among other things, Beijing's leaders believed that it was the Americans who
first proposed such a solution, and that the solution would allow each side to claim that it had not been defeated in the war.99 The most difficult spots in the negotiation, in Beijing's view, would not be over reaching an armistice, but on issues such as the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea, the settlement of the Taiwan question, and China's seat at the UN. Since Beijing's leaders were now willing to resolve these tough issues after the armistice was reached, they expected that the negotiations leading to an armistice would not last long.100

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

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

The next stage of negotiations was even more tortuous. After 26 July, the two parties began to focus their discussions on the second item on the agenda,
the fixation of the demarcation line. The Chinese/North Korean side, following the agreement reached between Beijing, Pyongyang, and Moscow, proposed that the demarcation line be on the 38th parallel. The U.S./UN side, however, countered with a line running basically between Pyongyang and Wonsan, about twenty to thirty (in some places forty) kilometers north of the existing front line between the Communist and UN forces, demanding more than 13,000 square kilometers of territory still under Communist control. Admiral Charles Turner Joy, the chief U.S./UN negotiator, argued that since the UN forces controlled the airspace over all Korean territory and the sea around the Korean Peninsula, they should be awarded additional territory on the ground in an armistice agreement. The Americans used arguments like this to bargain for a solution to end the war that was most advantageous to them, but Beijing’s leaders viewed them as evidence of Washington’s lack of interest in reaching an armistice.

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

Washington’s aggressive attitude toward fixing the demarcation lines further convinced Peng and his comrades that a “reasonable settlement” of the Korean conflict would not be reached unless the Chinese could teach the Americans “another lesson” on the battlefield. On 8 August, Peng Dehuai cabled Mao, reporting that the CPV had started the mobilization for the sixth campaign, and that this campaign aimed to annihilate the American Third
Division and the South Korean Second Division, thus pushing the front line back to areas south of the 38th parallel. On 17 August, the CPV headquarters issued the primary order to start the sixth campaign.

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

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

Beijing's leaders had to reconsider how best to define China's strategies to end the war. As early as 10 August, Mao instructed Zhou Enlai and Nie Rongzhen to review the CPV's plans for the sixth campaign, focusing on the feasibility of the campaign's goals as set by Chinese commanders. On 18 August, the day after the CPV issued the mobilization order for the sixth campaign, top Beijing leaders met to further contemplate all factors related to the cam-
On 19 August, the Central Military Commission of the CCP (CMC) sent a long telegram to Chinese commanders in Korea, instructing them to reconsider campaign plans. The telegram began with an analysis of the situation in Korea and Washington's intentions to cope with it. The CMC believed that the American objection to setting up the 38th parallel as the demarcation line was based more on political considerations than on military ones: on the one hand, sustained tension in Korea would help maintain the unity between the United States and its allies; on the other, Washington did not want to solve the Korean problem before the signing of a peace treaty with Japan. Therefore, the CMC predicted that, although it was unlikely for Washington to break off negotiations completely or to expand the war to China (since this would cause serious problems between Washington, London, and Paris), it was possible that the armistice negotiations would be drawn out. In line with these observations and speculations, the CMC instructed the CPV commanders to reconsider the necessity of waging a sixth campaign. The CMC particularly emphasized that unless Chinese commanders in Korea were certain that the sixth campaign would lead to the destruction of two enemy divisions and that it would not result in another Chinese/North Korean military setback, the campaign should be called off.

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

The Chinese walkout at this moment did not mean that Beijing was no longer interested in ending the war through negotiations; nor was it simply a gesture designed to strengthen Beijing's bargaining power. Beijing's leaders wanted an opportunity to reassess their position on the battlefield, as well as at the negotiation table, so that they could clarify and, if necessary, redefine China's negotiation strategies in light of the first forty days of the armistice talks. In addition, since Western powers were to meet in San Francisco early in September to sign a unilateral peace treaty with Japan, excluding China and
the Soviet Union, Beijing’s leaders wanted to see what Washington would do in Korea after that.125

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

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

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

As a result of this comprehensive review, a series of more clearly defined Chinese negotiation strategies came into shape. Even though “preparing for
a prolonged war while striving to end the war through peace negotiations” re-
mained the keynote of Chinese strategies, the Chinese/North Korean forces
would give up using large-scale offensive operations to force the enemy to
come to China’s terms. The Chinese now adopted a strategy of aggressive de-
fense on the battlefield, with the hope that the prospect of increasing casual-
ties in an endless war would eventually force U.S./UN forces to meet Beijing’s
minimum demands at the negotiation table. In other words, Beijing’s leaders
believed that as long as the Chinese troops were not defeated in Korea, they
would be in a position to claim a victory. The Chinese were now ready to
return to the negotiation table. On 25 October, armistice talks were resumed
at Panmunjom.

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

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

For a while, Chinese optimism seemed to be well-founded. Two days after
their meeting, an agreement on the demarcation lines was reached. On 27 November, negotiators agreed to accept the actual line of contact between the two sides. An armistice now seemed near.

**Deadlock: The POW Issue**

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the face of this unpredicted complexity, top Beijing leaders and Chinese negotiators focused their attention on the political aspect of the pow issue. In early May 1952, in a series of discussions on the essence of the U.S./UN pack-
age proposal of 28 April, members of the Chinese negotiation direction group concluded that the Americans aimed to achieve a politically superior position. In addition, Li Kenong pointed out that the Truman administration might not want to end the war at this moment for two reasons: first, in a presidential election year, Truman was concerned that a soft appearance might jeopardize the Democratic Party's electoral position; second, in order to increase military expenditures in the 1953 budget, the Korean War had to be continued.145

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

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

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

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Then the Chinese and North Korean Communists started a “condemning America” campaign to criticize this alleged crime and called for international investigation.\textsuperscript{152}

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

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

In the meantime, Beijing made real efforts to strengthen the Communists’ military position on the Korean battlefield. In August and September 1952, Zhou Enlai led a Chinese delegation to visit the Soviet Union to discuss, among other things, the acceleration of Soviet military aid to China.\textsuperscript{159} Beijing also hastened the rotation of Chinese troops in Korea. The Twenty-third, Twenty-fourth, and Forty-sixth Armies entered Korea in fall 1952, and the First, Sixteenth, Twenty-first, and Fifty-fourth Armies entered Korea in January 1953. By early 1953, the total number of Chinese troops in Korea reached 1.35 million (including logistics units), the highest level during China’s intervention in Korea.\textsuperscript{160} In addition, extraordinary efforts were made to guarantee the Chinese/North Korean forces’ logistical supply. During Zhou’s visit to the Soviet Union, Stalin agreed to send five additional Soviet antiaircraft regi-
ments to Korea. In late 1952 and early 1953, Beijing dispatched six divisions of railway engineering troops to Korea to construct new railways and maintain existing ones. The CPV’s Logistics Department stockpiled more than 120,000 tons of ammunition and more than 248,000 tons of grain in the winter and spring of 1952–53. Beijing’s leaders also paid special attention to establishing a consolidated defensive system on Korea’s east and west coasts to prevent possible U.S./UN landing operations in the Chinese/North Korean forces’ rear. In November and December 1952, how to prepare for possible enemy landing operations became the single most important issue on the CPV’s agenda. Mao believed that “if we could defeat this American attempt, the enemy would have nowhere to go, and his defeat will be certain.”

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

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

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

**Breaking the Deadlock**

Many researchers of the history of the Korean War have noted that a dramatic change in the Chinese/North Korean position came after Stalin's death in March 1953. On 27 March, the Communists agreed to the U.S./UN suggestion that sick and wounded prisoners be exchanged first. Three days later, Zhou Enlai proposed that the POWs who were unwilling to be repatriated be transferred to a neutral state "so as to ensure a just solution to the question of their repatriation." This statement reopened the door to an armistice, and discussions on resolving the POW issue resumed in late April. Some scholars, such as historian Kathryn Weathersby, have powerfully argued that Stalin's death played an important, if not decisive, role in the softening of the Communist attitude toward the POW issue, and that a logical argument following this speculation is that the tough Chinese approach over the POW issue reflected Stalin's unwillingness to end the Korean War.

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

However, it is implausible to attribute completely the changing Chinese attitude over the POW issue to Stalin's death. Chinese sources now available demonstrate that a more conciliatory approach on Beijing's part had its own logic that can only be understood in a broader and more complex framework. Beijing's tough attitude toward the POW issue was designed not to close the
door to an armistice but to achieve favorable political and military positions before the Chinese returned to the negotiation table. This position was certainly compatible with Beijing’s overall management of the Korean crisis, which from the beginning centered around the crisis’ domestic and international political implications. Therefore, Beijing’s unyielding stand on the row issue should be regarded more as a response to the Americans’ use of the issue to put Beijing on the defensive than as an unwilling gesture made under Stalin’s pressure.

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

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

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

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

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

On 19 February 1953, Qiao Guanhua, following Zhou Enlai's instructions, sent a report to Beijing summarizing the Chinese negotiation team's analysis of the situation in Korea and the Chinese strategy at the moment. The report observed that there existed little possibility that the United States would initiate major military offensives on the Korean battlefield, and that the Eisen-
hower administration's new policy of "releasing Jiang" in the Taiwan Strait was designed to place more pressure on China rather than to allow Jiang to attempt amphibious operations against the Chinese mainland. (In other words, the Chinese negotiators believed that the Chinese/North Korean forces had achieved a relatively favorable position on the Korean battlefield.) But since the United States had referred the Korean problem again to the United Nations, and since the American military had not given up the illusion that UN forces could achieve further military superiority on the battlefield, it was unlikely that the Americans would soon return to Panmunjom. If China proposed an unconditional reopening of negotiations under these circumstances, the report speculated, the Americans might take it as an indication of Chinese weakness. The report therefore suggested that China should do nothing and wait for the Americans to take the next initiative.\textsuperscript{181} Mao and Zhou agreed with this analysis, and Mao even predicted that the Americans most likely would appeal to the Soviets to make the first move.\textsuperscript{182}

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

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

The situation suddenly changed on the early morning of 18 June, when President Syngman Rhee released more than 25,000 anti-Communist North Korean prisoners held by South Korean forces.\textsuperscript{186} That afternoon, top Beijing leaders Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De discussed the situation. In a telegram to the CPV and Chinese negotiators the next day, Mao said that he
believed it unlikely that the United States would support Rhee’s attempt to delay a final agreement because this would put Washington under “tremen-
dous pressures” at home and abroad. It was more likely, observed the chair-
man, that the Americans would force Rhee to accept an armistice. Mao now
believed that the Chinese strategy should focus on “taking advantage of the
contradictions between the Americans and the South Koreans.”

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

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

**Conclusion**

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

The Chinese experience in Korea from October 1950 to May 1951, how-
ever, made it clear to Beijing’s leaders that China’s capacity to wage war did
not equal its ambitious aims. It thus became necessary for Beijing’s leaders to
make fundamental adjustments to China’s war objectives, as well as its strate-
gies to end the war. After reassessing China’s gains and losses in Korea and
consulting with Moscow and Pyongyang, Beijing’s leaders changed their definition of “China’s victory in Korea” by arguing that Communist China was already victorious since Chinese troops had pushed the U.S./UN force back to the 38th parallel. The Chinese negotiators came to the negotiation table in July 1951, believing that an armistice would soon follow.

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

Beijing’s changing policies toward concluding the military conflict in Korea had been shaped by many concerns, including how to accurately assess America’s intentions and capabilities, how to coordinate with Pyongyang and Moscow in formulating diplomatic policies and military strategies, and how to evaluate China’s comprehensive political and military gains and losses in a particular armistice agreement. But, most of all, Beijing’s strategy toward ending the war was determined by the rationale behind the transformation of China’s state and society and the promotion of its international prestige and influence. When the war ended, Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders could claim that they had been successful in reaching both their domestic and their international aims—although the price had been heavy. This success, in turn, would encourage Mao and his fellow Beijing leaders to treat Communist China’s foreign policy as an integral part of China’s continuous revolution. Communist China had further secured its status as a revolutionary power.
CHAPTER 7
BEIJING AND THE TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS OF 1958

We must not fear the ghost. The more we fear the ghost, the more it will present a deadly threat to us, and then it will invade our house and swallow us. Since we do not fear the ghost, we decide to shell Jinmen.
—Mao Zedong (1958)

Besides its disadvantageous side, a tense [international] situation can mobilize the population, can particularly mobilize the backward people, can mobilize the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction.
—Mao Zedong (1958)

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

In the ensuing six weeks, the PLA’s artillery bombardment continued, and several hundred thousand artillery shells exploded on the Jinmen islands and in the waters around them. By early September, a massive PLA invasion of Jinmen and other GMD-controlled offshore islands seemed imminent. In response to the rapidly escalating crisis in the Taiwan Strait, the Eisenhower administration reinforced the strength of the Seventh Fleet in East Asia and ordered U.S. naval vessels to help the GMD protect Jinmen’s supply lines.³ The leaders of the Soviet Union were also alarmed. Fearing that Beijing’s provocation might get out of control and cause a general confrontation involving the use of nuclear weapons between the Communist and capitalist blocs, they sent Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to Beijing early in September to inquire about Chinese
leaders’ intentions. Early in October, however, the situation changed abruptly. On 6 October, Beijing issued a “Message to the Compatriots in Taiwan” in the name of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai, calling for a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue so that all Chinese might unite in opposition to the “American plot” to divide China permanently. From that day on, the PLA dramatically relaxed its siege of Jinmen. Consequently, the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis ended without provoking a major confrontation between the Communist and capitalist camps.

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

**Beijing’s Taiwan Policy, 1949–1958**

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

*The First Phase: Preparing to “Liberate Taiwan,” Fall 1949–Summer 1950*

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

The CCP leadership began planning for an attack on Taiwan in mid-June 1949. On 14 June, Mao Zedong sent a telegram to PLA commanders in East China, urging them to “pay attention to seizing Taiwan immediately.” A week later, Mao dispatched another telegram to top PLA commanders in coastal provinces, again stressing the utmost importance of quickly settling the Taiwan issue and ordering them to “complete all preparations during summer and
autumn [of 1949] and occupy Taiwan in the coming winter.”⁸ Contemplating the means needed for seizing Taiwan, Mao paid special attention to getting assistance from Communist operatives in the GMD and air and naval support from the Soviet Union.⁹ During Liu Shaoqi’s secret visit to Moscow from late June to early August, the CCP’s second in command endeavored to persuade Stalin to commit the strength of the Soviet Union behind the PLA’s Taiwan campaign. The Soviet leader, however, agreed only to help the CCP establish its own air force and navy.¹⁰ Consequently, the CCP leadership had to extend the deadline for completing the Taiwan campaign preparations to summer 1950.¹¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mao, as well as Beijing's top military planners, decided to liberate the islands off Zhejiang province before attacking Jinmen for two tactical reasons. First, the Zhejiang area was close to Shanghai, China's main industrial center, and the mouth of the Yangzi River. Since 1949, the GMD had continuously used the islands off Zhejiang as bases to harass the mainland's coastal region, threatening the security of Shanghai and neighboring areas, as well as blocking the maritime transportation route south of the Yangzi River. Seizing these islands would greatly enhance the PRC's coastal security in the Shanghai-Zhejiang region. Second, Fujian was one of China's most backward regions and had no railway or modern airport at that time, making it difficult for the PLA to orga-
nize large-scale amphibious landing operations there. In comparison, the GMD had greatly strengthened Jinmen's defensive system since 1949–50, transforming the island into an enhanced fortress. Beijing's leaders thus believed that until the PLA could improve logistic capacity and receive proper air support in Fujian, the plan to invade Jinmen should be put on hold.26

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

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

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

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

Therefore, Mao and the Beijing leadership decided to order the PLA to shell Jinmen to expose Washington’s plot of “interfering with China’s internal affairs.”

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

This emphasis upon using the Taiwan issue to promote domestic mobilization, however, contradicted from the beginning the “peaceful coexistence” foreign policy line Zhou Enlai was endeavoring to promote around the same period. It also caused great confusion in terms of Beijing’s goals for the new strategy (that is, deterring American interference in China’s internal affairs and driving a wedge between Taipei and Washington). When the PLA’s shore batteries fiercely bombarded Jinmen on 3 and 22 September, and especially after the PLA increased pressure on the GMD-controlled Dachen and Yijiangshan islands off Zhejiang, Washington and Taipei accelerated negotiations toward signing a defense treaty. On 2 December 1954, the treaty was formally signed, with Washington officially committing to using military force to defend Taiwan in the case of a Communist invasion. The treaty, though, did not include explicit U.S. commitment to defending the GMD-controlled off-shore islands. When the PLA finally conducted a full-scale landing operation in Dachen and Yijiangshan in January 1955, Washington, except for helping GMD troops to withdraw from these islands, did not intervene. When the PLA occupied all GMD-controlled islands off Zhejiang province in February 1955.
and, two months later, Zhou Enlai announced in Bandung, Indonesia, that Beijing was willing to negotiate with Washington to "reduce the tension in the Far East," the first Taiwan Strait crisis ended.40

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

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

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

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

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

**1958: The Year of Mao’s Revolutionary Outburst**

Beijing’s return to a more militant strategy toward Taiwan began around late 1957 and early 1958. On 18 December 1957, Mao Zedong instructed Peng Dehuai, China’s defense minister, to “consider the question of moving our air force into Fujian in 1958.” In mid-January, the headquarters of Fujian Military Region formulated plans for PLA air units to enter Fujian by early summer
1958. On 31 January 1958, Peng reported at a CMC meeting that a main railway line leading to Xiamen had been completed (which was key to the PLA's large-scale military operations aimed at Jinmen), that numerous PLA artillery units had been deployed in Fujian, and that the PLA air force would finish all preparations for occupying the newly constructed airfields in Fujian in July or August. Early in March, Mao approved Peng's plans. In April, the headquarters of the Fujian Military Region followed the CMC's instruction to work out a detailed contingency plan to shell Jinmen and formally submitted it to Beijing for approval on 27 April. Behind these changes was Mao himself. When top CCP leaders met in Chengdu in March, Mao announced that he had not been personally involved in military decision making since the Korean War and that "this year I will come back to do some military [commanding] work." All of these developments, as it soon turned out, would become the prelude to Mao's decision to shell Jinmen in summer 1958.

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

These interpretations make good sense as far as they go. But they do not take into consideration the profound connections between Beijing's changing policy toward Taiwan and the broader domestic and international environment in which Beijing's leaders formulated the policy. In order to understand the dynamics underlying Beijing's decision to shell Jinmen in summer 1958, the decision must be placed into the context of the emerging Great Leap Forward, one of the most important episodes in the development of Mao's continuous revolution. Indeed, as revealed by recently released Chinese evidence, the CCP leadership's handling of the Taiwan issue in 1958 was from the beginning shaped by the revolutionary zeal prevailing in Chinese political and social life during this unique moment in China's modern history.
Mao’s revolutionary outburst began early in 1958, with the Chinese chairman using every opportunity to argue that the “revolutionary enthusiasm” of the masses was required to push China’s “socialist revolution and reconstruction” to a higher level. In the chairman’s vision, the successful completion of the “socialist transformation” of China’s industry, commerce, and agriculture in 1956 had already prepared conditions for Chinese society to enter a new stage in the Marxist order of socioeconomic development. By turning the Hundred Flowers Campaign into an Anti-Rightist movement in 1957, the chairman clearly revealed his determination to create a new wave of mass mobilization by manipulating China’s “public opinion.” At a series of conferences attended by top party leaders early in 1958, Mao fiercely criticized the mistakes of “opposing rash advance” committed by Zhou Enlai and others in 1956-57. In the meantime, he repeatedly outlined the blueprint for building a Communist society in China, calling upon the whole party and the whole country to “do away with all fetishes and superstitions, and [to] defy laws both human and divine.” Consequently, in summer 1958, Mao and the CCP leadership, formally announcing that “the realization of a Communist society in China is not far away,” unleashed the Great Leap Forward throughout China’s cities and countryside.

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

Against this background, in the spring and summer of 1958, Beijing initiated a series of diplomatic “offensives.” As discussed in Chapter 3, when the Soviet leaders proposed to form a joint submarine flotilla with China and to establish a long-wave radio station on Chinese territory, Mao immediately characterized these proposals as indications of Moscow’s “big-power chauvinism,” throwing the leaders in the Kremlin on the defensive. Early in May, after
two right-wing Japanese youth destroyed the PRC’s flag at a Chinese exhibition in Nagasaki, Beijing’s leaders quickly characterized this incident as a “serious imperialist plot” designed to attack the dignity and reputation of the People’s Republic. In protest, Beijing decided to cancel all of China’s trade and cultural exchanges with Japan, which led to further erosion of Beijing’s already highly strained relations with Tokyo. It was within the context of these “offensives” that Mao made the decision to shell Jinmen.

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

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

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

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

The Decision to Shell Jinmen

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

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

Beijing's protest was not confined to mere words. On 17 July, without consulting other top leaders in Beijing, Mao asked Peng Dehuai to convey the
following order to the PLA’s General Staff: In response to the crisis situation in the Middle East, the air force should move into Fujian as soon as possible, the Fujian shore batteries should be prepared to shell Jinmen and blockade Jinmen’s supply lines, and the General Staff should work out plans for conducting these operations immediately.72

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

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

The Chinese military machine was promptly put into motion after the meeting. At 11:00 p.m. on 18 July, the PLA General Staff relayed the CMC’s order by security telephone to General Ye Fei, political commissar of the Fujian Military Region who, according to Mao’s order, would assume the frontal commanding duty for the shelling operation. Ye immediately met with his staff to discuss how to implement the order. They decided to concentrate, by the evening of 24 July, thirty artillery battalions in the Xiamen area directed against Jinmen and another four artillery battalions in the Lianjiang area di-
rected against Mazu. In the meantime, the air force decided that their air units would move into several Fujian and nearby eastern Guangdong airfields in two groups on 24 and 27 July, and that additional antiaircraft artillery units and radar units would be dispatched to Fujian. On 20 July, the naval headquarters ordered the units under its command to complete all preparations for operations in Fujian.

In the next several days, the railways and highways leading to the Fujian coast became jammed by large numbers of PLA artillery and other supporting units being transferred to the front. Despite the difficulties created by a severe typhoon on 21 July, Ye Fei was able to report to Mao and the CMC on 23 July that thirty-three artillery battalions had taken position on the Fujian coast, that about 50,000 artillery shells had been distributed among front units, with another 100,000 shells on their way, and that all other preparations would be completed by 24 July. Ye also summarized the Fujian Military Region’s operation plans: “(1) We plan to use our artillery forces to conduct abrupt and fierce shelling of the enemy in Jinmen and Mazu simultaneously. (2) In terms of the targets of our artillery strike in Jinmen, we will concentrate on attacking the enemy’s docks, artillery grounds, and important warehouses. (3) We will then be prepared to enter operations in the air and, at the same time, will use our shore batteries to blockade the enemy’s ports and airfields, striking continuously the enemy’s artillery forces and other reinforcements.”

Although no landing operation was mentioned in these well-calculated plans, it is logical to conclude that the PLA would try to take over Jinmen and Mazu after significantly weakening the enemy’s defense capacity and cutting off its supply lines.

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

I could not sleep and have thought about the question again. It seems more appropriate to hold the shelling on Jinmen for several more days. While holding our operations, we will observe the development of the situation. ... We will wait until the other side launches a provocative attack and then
respond with our counterattack. The solution of the problem in the Middle East will take time. Since we have time, why should we be in a big hurry? We will hold our attack plan for the moment, but one day we will implement it. If the other side invades Zhangzhou, Shantou, Fuzhou, and Hangzhou, that is the best scenario. . . . It is extremely beneficial to have politics in a commanding position and to make a decision only after repeated deliberations. . . . Even if the other side attacks us, we still can wait for a few days to make clear calculations and then start our counterattack. . . . We must persist in the principle of fighting no battle we are not sure of winning.  

Why did Mao decide to put the shelling of Jinmen on hold at the last minute? One possible explanation was that the chairman was not certain if the PLA artillery units on the Fujian front had indeed reached full readiness, and that he knew that his air force would need more time to occupy the airfields in Fujian.  

As a longtime advocate of "never fighting a battle without being fully prepared," the chairman must have felt it necessary to give the PLA more time to complete all preparations. The chairman also must have realized that the shelling would inevitably escalate the tension between China and the United States, and although he repeatedly claimed that he would never be scared by the American "paper tiger," he would like to calculate possible American reactions more carefully. Furthermore, given the emphasis he had placed upon the political impact of the shelling, it is possible that Mao hoped that the PLA's military concentration in the coastal area might trigger a GMD preemptive military attack on the mainland (most likely by air bombardment), which would provide additional justification for the PLA to shell Jinmen and thus greatly enhance the shelling's mobilization effect upon ordinary Chinese people.

In addition, Mao may have decided to postpone the shelling because Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was scheduled to visit Beijing in a few days to deal with a potential crisis recently emerging between Beijing and Moscow. In summer 1958 Moscow proposed to Beijing to establish a joint Soviet-Chinese submarine flotilla and a jointly owned long-wave radio station on the Chinese coast, which Beijing opposed immediately. On 22 July 1958, five days before Mao decided to postpone the shelling of Jinmen, he had a highly emotional talk with Pavel Yudin, Soviet ambassador to China, during which he criticized Moscow's proposals as evidence of Soviet leaders' "big-power chauvinism," as well as their desire to control China. Khrushchev, after receiving Yudin's report, quickly decided to travel to Beijing to meet Mao. Although we have no way of knowing exactly how this turn of events might have influenced Mao's
consideration of the Taiwan issue, one thing is certain: the Chinese chairman did not want to let the Soviet leader have any impact on his decision making on Taiwan. When Khrushchev was in Beijing from 31 July to 3 August, he had four substantial meetings with Mao and other Chinese leaders, but Mao never informed Khrushchev that the PLA was planning to shell Jinmen. From the beginning, for Mao, the shelling was a challenge not just to Taipei and Washington but to Moscow’s domination of the international Communist movement as well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As he did on so many other occasions in the summer of 1958, the chairman again explained how international tension could be beneficial to China’s con-
tinuous revolution. He told Wu Lengxi that the Chinese media should continue to propagandize that China opposed the international tension created by the imperialists and was in favor of relaxing international tension. However, stressed the chairman, his real belief was that “all bad things have two sides.” While “international tension is certainly a bad thing, there is a good side of it: it will bring about the awakening of many people, and will make them determined to fight against the imperialists.”

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

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

As the conflict in the Taiwan Strait escalated, Mao called another Politburo Standing Committee meeting on the afternoon of 25 August, specifically devoted to the discussion of Washington’s reaction and Beijing’s next move. Again the chairman dominated the meeting. Beginning his talk by joking that “now we are taking our summer vacation here at Beidaihe, but we have made the Americans extremely nervous,” the chairman told the participants that, according to his observations, Washington was worried that the PLA not only would land on Jinmen and Mazu but also would attack Taiwan itself. “In reality,” commented the chairman, “although we have fired dozens of thousands of rounds on Jinmen, we only mean to probe [the Americans’ intention]. We will not say if we are, or if we are not, going to land on Jinmen. We will be doubly cautious and will act in accordance with the situation.” The chairman further clarified that he was taking such a cautious attitude not be-
cause there were 95,000 GMD troops stationed on Jinmen islands but because he needed to assess the attitude of the American government. “Washington has signed a treaty of mutual defense with Taiwan, but it does not clearly spell out whether or not the U.S. defense perimeter includes Jinmen and Mazu.” Thus, Mao continued, “we need to see if the Americans want to carry these islands on their backs.” In the chairman’s opinion, the best way to deal with the Americans at the moment was to keep them guessing. Thus Mao directed the Chinese media not to link U.S. actions in the Middle East directly with the PLA’s bombardment of Jinmen for the moment, but rather to criticize Washington’s “imperialist behavior” in broad terms, including its “occupation of China’s Taiwan.” “We should build up our strength and store up our energy, that is, draw the bow but not discharge the arrow,” concluded the chairman.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The “Noose Strategy”

Beijing’s leaders did not have to wait long for Washington’s response. The same day that Beijing announced the extent of its territorial water, U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles, after meeting with President Eisenhower, issued a statement on the Taiwan Strait crisis. He emphasized that “[t]he
United States is bound by treaty to help defend Taiwan (Formosa) from armed attack” and that “we have recognized that the securing and protecting of Quemoy [Jinmen] and Matsu [Mazu] have increasingly become related to the defense of Taiwan.” In the same statement, Dulles also indicated that Washington was willing to resume the ambassadorial talks with Beijing in order to reach an agreement on “mutual and reciprocal renunciation of force” in the Taiwan Strait.117 Dulles’s statement, along with Washington’s subsequent announcement that the Seventh Fleet would begin escorting GMD supply vessels to Jinmen, brought the Taiwan Strait crisis to a crucial juncture. Now Beijing’s leaders had to face the tough reality that if the shelling on Jinmen went out of control, a direct military confrontation with the United States could follow. Within this framework, Mao introduced his “noose strategy.”

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

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

On 5 and 8 September, Mao made two speeches at the Fifteenth Meeting of the Supreme State Council, in which he explained in particular what he
meant by using a “noose strategy” to deal with the Americans. The chairman repeatedly stressed that international tension was more a “good thing” than a “bad thing” because it would help mobilize the people both in China and in the world, that Washington feared Beijing more than Beijing feared Washington, and that, in the final analysis, “the East Wind has overwhelmed the West Wind.” Within this context, the chairman claimed that Jinmen and Taiwan, like many other places in the world where the United States had military bases, were “nooses” for the United States:

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

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

“Dancing” with Moscow, Negotiating with Washington

On 6 September, Zhou Enlai issued a formal response to Dulles’s statement of two days earlier. The Chinese premier sternly condemned Washington’s
“policy of aggression” in the Taiwan Strait and “continuous intervention in China’s internal affairs.” He reiterated that it was within China’s sovereignty for Beijing to use military means to deal with the GMD’s “sabotage and harassment activities.” But Zhou also stated that Beijing would make a distinction between the “international dispute between China and the United States in the Taiwan Strait” and the “internal matter of the Chinese people’s efforts to liberate Taiwan,” and thus was willing to “sit down at the negotiation table with the Americans to discuss how to relax and eliminate the tension in the Taiwan Strait.”

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

Gromyko arrived in Beijing on the morning of 6 September and met with Zhou Enlai at 2 p.m. the same day. At the beginning of the meeting, Zhou gave Gromyko a copy of the statement he had issued that day, and the Soviet foreign
minister presented to Zhou a draft letter Khrushchev was preparing to send to Eisenhower. With Gromyko’s prodding, Zhou again explained Beijing’s aims and plans regarding Taiwan, basically repeating what he had told Sudarikov the day before. Gromyko stated that “the CC cpcu is in full support of the stand and measures taken by the Chinese comrades.” He also mentioned that Zhou’s statement and Khrushchev’s letter to Eisenhower represented “two important actions that are highly compatible and mutually supplementary on the diplomatic front.”

At 6:30 p.m. Gromyko met with Mao. He again expressed Moscow’s support for the “stand, policies, and measures” Beijing had taken during the Taiwan Strait crisis. In addition, he emphasized that Khrushchev’s letter to Eisenhower would send a “serious warning” to the Americans, which should make the Americans calm down, “as if they had taken a cold bath.” Mao found that “ninety percent” of Khrushchev’s message to Eisenhower was “correct,” and only “a few points may need to be further discussed.” With Beijing’s consent, Khrushchev sent the letter to Eisenhower on 7 September, warning Washington that an attack on China “is an attack on the Soviet Union” and that Moscow would “do everything” to defend both countries.

Behind this open demonstration of solidarity between Beijing and Moscow, the Sino-Soviet schism that had emerged after Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization widened. According to Soviet documentary records and Gromyko’s recollections, how to deal with Washington’s nuclear threat was an important topic the Soviet foreign minister discussed with both Zhou and Mao. Zhou told Gromyko: “Inflicting blows on the offshore islands, the PRC has taken into consideration the possibility of the outbreak in this region of a local war between the United States and the PRC, and it is now ready to take all the hard blows, including atomic bombs and the destruction of its cities.” The Chinese premier advised the Soviet foreign minister that the Soviet Union should not take part in the Sino-American war “even if the Americans used tactical nuclear weapons.” Only if Washington resorted to using “larger nuclear weapons” and risked broadening the war “should the Soviet Union respond with a nuclear counterstrike.” In his memoirs, Gromyko recorded a similar conversation with Mao. The Chinese chairman, according to Gromyko, stated that if the Americans were to invade the Chinese mainland or to use nuclear weapons, the Chinese forces would retreat, drawing American ground forces into China’s interior. The chairman proposed that during the initial stage of the war, the Soviets should do nothing but watch. Only after the American forces had entered China’s interior should Moscow use “all means at its disposal” (which Gromyko understood as Soviet nuclear weapons) to destroy them.
Although China's official account of the conversation angrily rebutted Gromyko's story after it was first published in 1988, claiming it to be a "serious distortion of the historical truth," 131 I believe that both Mao and Zhou had made these statements concerning the danger of a nuclear war since both remarks were consistent with Mao's own philosophy and view on this issue. Since the mid-1950s, Mao had repeatedly expressed his unique views on the destructive effects of nuclear weapons, claiming that "even if the American atom bombs were so powerful that, when all dropped on China, they would make a hole right through the earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole, although it might be a major event for the solar system." 132 For Mao, the discussion concerned not a strategic matter but rather a philosophical issue. With a profound belief that "history is on our side," Mao, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, often adopted a very special definition of space and time in discussions of important policy and strategic issues, referring to the universe (or "all under the heaven"—Tianxia in Chinese) and "ten thousand years" as the basic scale in measuring the grand mission of his revolution. Within this context, Mao would often describe nuclear weapons as nothing but a "paper tiger." Mao's unconventional attitude toward nuclear weapons had already scared many of his Communist comrades in other parts of the world (especially at the summit of Communist leaders in Moscow in November 1957); this time, he alarmed his comrades from Moscow. 133

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

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

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

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

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

The Sino-American ambassadorial talks first opened in Geneva in August 1955, serving as the only channel of communication between Beijing and Washington. In December 1957, the meetings were suspended when the American negotiator, Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, was reassigned to Thailand and the Chinese refused to accept his replacement, Edwin Martin, because he was not an ambassador.\textsuperscript{139} On 30 June, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement, demanding that Washington appoint an ambassadorial negotiator in fifteen days; if Washington did not comply, Beijing would regard the talks
as being terminated by the American side. Washington, though missing the fifteen-day deadline to name a new negotiator, announced on 28 July that the U.S. ambassador to Poland, Jacob Beam, had been appointed as the American representative to the talks, which would be moved to Warsaw.

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

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

The new Chinese stand demonstrated that Mao was now willing to bring the Taiwan Strait crisis to an end through negotiating with the Americans. Mao triggered the crisis himself in the first place, so he could have ended it
easily—for example, just by ordering the PLA to lift the siege of Jinmen—if he had wanted to do so. But Mao needed the crisis to end in a way that would allow him to claim a great victory. This was particularly important for Mao since the shelling of Jinmen was central to promoting his Great Leap Forward. He also knew that profound differences in opinion existed between Taipei and Washington, so he believed it possible to “persuade” the Americans to force the GMD to withdraw from Jinmen and other offshore islands.144

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

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

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

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

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

But this episode had already completely changed Mao’s view of and, as a result, strategies toward the ambassadorial talks. Instead of regarding the talks as a chance to bring about acceptable solutions to the crisis in the Taiwan Strait, Mao now firmly believed that he had no other choice but to treat the talks as a forum to expose the “reactionary” and “aggressive” nature of America’s imperialist policy in East Asia. Following Mao’s instructions, Zhou called a series of meetings at the Foreign Ministry to consider new diplomatic alternatives. The participants concluded that Beijing “should adopt a policy line of positive offensive” toward the Americans at the forthcoming meetings.
“If the American side fails to respond to our proposal directly and continues to argue for an immediate cease-fire,” reported Zhou in a letter to Mao on 17 September, “we should immediately present another proposal, demanding that the Americans withdraw all of their armed forces from Taiwan, Penghu, and the Taiwan Strait, stop all provocative military actions in China’s territorial space and water, and cease interference in China’s internal affairs, thus relaxing the tension existing in the Taiwan Strait.”

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

In order to counter America’s cease-fire request, we should expand our activities in all respects to demand that U.S. armed forces stop all provocations and withdraw from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait. Concrete measures are as follows: (1) Prepare a statement by the foreign minister to rebut Dulles’s UN speech. (2) After the issuance of the statement, mobilize newspapers, various parties, and people’s organizations all over the country to echo it. (3) Convey our strategies to Soviet chargé d’affaires and Liu Xiao
[Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union], letting them convey [our plans] to Khrushchev and Gromyko, so that the Soviet Union and other fraternal countries will cooperate with us.\(^3\)

Zhou's new plans delighted Mao. The chairman immediately wrote to the premier, praising these plans as “very good indeed” since they “will allow us to gain the initiative.” The chairman also instructed Zhou to “take due action immediately”; in particular, he asked Zhou to convey these plans both to Wang Bingnan in Warsaw and to Ye Fei in Fujian, “making sure that they understand that the keys to our new policy and new tactics are to hold the initiative, to keep the offensive, and to remain reasonable.” The chairman commented at the end of the letter: “Sweeping down irresistibly from a commanding height, and advancing like a knife cutting through a piece of bamboo—this is what our diplomatic struggle needs to be.”\(^4\) With the implementation of Mao’s instructions, the possibility of ending the crisis through the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw virtually disappeared.\(^5\)

“Leaving Jinmen in Jiang’s Hands”

In late September, when the crisis was entering its second month, the tension in the Taiwan Strait looked as bad as—if not worse than—it did at any point in the previous four weeks. On 22 September, when Wang and Beam met for the third time in Warsaw, the Chinese ambassador was primed for a counteroffensive. He called the proposal Beam presented on 18 September, which emphasized immediate cease-fire as the first step toward relaxing tension in the Taiwan Strait, “absurd and absolutely unacceptable.” Abandoning his own offer from one week earlier, Wang presented a new three-point proposal, which established U.S. withdrawal of all its armed forces as the precondition to ease the tension in the Taiwan Strait area. The Swiss embassy was turned into a battlefield of sharp accusations and denunciations, with Wang and Beam rebutting every point the other side was making and charging the other side for causing the crisis in Taiwan and in East Asia.\(^6\)

At the same time that Wang was “taking the offensive” in Warsaw, Zhou Enlai was making every effort to mobilize international support. On 18 September, Zhou met with S. F. Antonov, Soviet chargé d’affaires in Beijing, to brief him on recent developments in the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou told him that after the first meeting of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, Beijing firmly believed that “the central issue is that the United States should withdraw all of its armed forces from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait area, and that only after the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces will the tension in
this area be eliminated.” Zhou also told Antonov that if Washington continued
to request an immediate cease-fire in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing would demand
the withdrawal of all U.S. forces first. In the meantime, Beijing would “mo-
obilize the entire Chinese media to demand that the U.S. armed forces with-
draw from the Taiwan Strait area,” and the PLA would “continue to concen-
trate on conducting punitive shelling of Jiang’s troops on Jinmen and Mazu.”
Zhou asked Antonov to convey these points to the Soviet government as well
as to the Soviet representative to the UN. In the following days, Zhou met
with Indian, Burmese, and Ceylonese ambassadors to China, as well as a gov-
ernmental delegation from Cambodia, denouncing Washington’s “cease-fire
plot” at Warsaw and asking the representatives of these “friendly countries”
to prevent Dulles from “playing with the same cease-fire plot” at the UN. On 20 September, Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi issued a statement to re-
but Dulles’s speech of four days earlier, claiming that “the six hundred million
Chinese people are determined to unite together to resist the U.S. aggressors
and to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the great socialist
motherland.”

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

Under the current situation, it is appropriate for the guidelines for opera-
tions in Jinmen to remain “shelling but not landing” and “cutting off [the
enemy’s supplies] but not letting [the enemy] die,” so as to make the enemy
panicky day and night without being able to take any rest. It is indeed not
easy to coordinate a joint operation of the navy, air force, and ground artil-
lery force, and there is the possibility that American ships and planes could
be hit. It is even more inappropriate for our air force to bomb Jinmen, as
this will provide Jiang’s air force with an excuse to bomb the mainland. At present, the U.S. is controlling Jiang’s air force, not allowing it to bombard the mainland, and one main reason for this is that they are not certain how our air force will retaliate: by bombing Jinmen or Taiwan? Since the Americans are unable to predict the direction of our air force’s operations, it is beneficial to us not to trigger Jiang’s air force to bomb the mainland. If Jiang’s air force bombs the mainland and we are only able to bomb Jinmen (but not Taiwan), we are showing our weaknesses.  

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

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

However, at the end of September, when signs indicated that Washington might be willing to end the crisis along the lines of the first scenario, Beijing’s whole approach toward seizing Jinmen, a key goal of the shelling campaign, changed completely. On 30 September, Dulles made extensive comments on the Taiwan Strait crisis at a news conference. In response to a question concerning whether it would be feasible for the GMD troops to withdraw from the offshore islands, the secretary of state asserted, “It all depends upon the circumstances under which they would be withdrawn. . . . If there were a cease-
fire in the area which seemed to be reasonably dependable, I think it would be foolish to keep these large forces on these islands.”

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

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

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

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

At the same time that Mao was shuffling military deployments, Zhou was busy with diplomatic activities. He first met with Indonesia's ambassador to China. The premier told him that he had learned that eight countries, with Indonesia as one of the main initiators, had been preparing to issue a statement concerning the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou advised the Indonesian am-
bassador that the statement should acknowledge that Taiwan was part of Chi-
nese territory, that the crisis was the result of America's policy of aggression
in the Taiwan area, and that Washington had no right to intervene in Jinmen
and Mazu. Zhou then met with the Soviet chargé d'affaires. After inform-
ing Antonov that Beijing had decided that "it is better to leave Jinmen and
Mazu in Jiang's hands," the premier gave a detailed explanation about why Bei-
jing had reached this decision. In particular, said the premier, the new policy
would turn Jinmen and Mazu into a huge burden for Washington; "whenever
we wanted tension, we will strike at them, and whenever we want relaxation,
we will loosen [the noose] there." Thus the new policy would play the role of
"educating the people of the world, and primarily the Chinese people," while
deepening the already profound contradictions between Taipei and Washing-
ton. The premier asked that Moscow give the policy its full support.

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

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

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

**Conclusion**

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

As indicated in this study, Mao decided to bring China into the crisis primarily for the purpose of creating an extraordinary environment in which the full potential of the Great Leap Forward—a crucial episode in the development of Mao’s grand enterprise of continuous revolution—would be thoroughly realized. No other world leader had ever used such straightforward and enthusiastic language as did Mao in 1958 to discuss the huge advantage involved in using international tension to initiate domestic mobilization. Mao certainly was obsessed by a tremendous sense of insecurity, but his fear in no way resembled any of the conventional “threat perceptions” that prevailed during the Cold War period; first and foremost, Mao’s obsession was the product of his unique “postrevolution anxiety.” What worried the chairman most was that if he failed to find new and effective means to enhance the inner dynamics of his continuous revolution, the revolution would lose its momentum and, as a result, would eventually wither. For Mao, this was a threat of
a fatal nature, and he was determined to do anything possible to prevent it from happening. In 1958, in the context of the emerging Great Leap, Mao's determination was easily transformed into his decision to initiate a crisis in the Taiwan Strait by ordering the PLA to shell the Jinmen islands. In a sense, the Great Leap was for Mao a great drama, one that was designed to mobilize and enhance the revolutionary enthusiasm of China's ordinary people. The shelling and the crisis played a role similar to the drumbeats in a Beijing opera—without them the drama would completely lose its rhythm, dramaticism, and theatricality, and thus would lose the very elements for which it is performed in the first place.

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

Mao also used the crisis to challenge the postwar international order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. That Mao acted to put the United States on the defensive by constantly probing Washington's intentions and strategic bottom lines was evident in terms of both his rhetoric and diplomatic and military strategies. What should be emphasized is that underlying his behavior was also a profound desire to push the United States to recognize that his China was a qualified challenger to America's regional and global hegemony, thus making China a central actor in international politics. This
is why, despite the fact that China is so far away from the Middle East and had so few practical interests there, Mao still found it necessary for Beijing to respond to the American-British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan in dramatic ways.

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

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