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CHINA'S WAR FOR KOREA

Geostrategic decisions, war-fighting experience and high-priced benefits from intervention, 1950–53

Xiaobing Li

From 1950 to 1953, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) despatched more than 3 million troops to Korea. In October 1950, when the Chinese launched numerous offensive campaigns trying to drive the United Nations forces out of Korea, it became clear that the conflict was now a war between China and the UN forces. General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the UN forces, reported to Washington that the United Nations faced 'an entirely new war' in Korea.¹ Although still confronting more than a million Kuomintang (KMT) remnants of the Chinese Civil War on Taiwan and in south-western China (1946–49), Beijing chose to fight the UN forces in a new international war: the 'war to resist America and aid Korea' (*kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng*). With its irregular 'foot soldiers' armed with obsolete weaponry, the Chinese regular army, the People's Liberation Army or PLA (known in the Korean War as the Chinese People's Volunteer Force or CPVF), seemed no match for the UN forces with their vastly superior air, naval and ground firepower.

1 W.W. Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947–1950*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1981, p. 3.

This article provides some insight into the PLA's operations and experience in the Korean War, in which China suffered more than 1 million casualties. It offers a Chinese perspective on Beijing's strategic concerns and operational behaviour, and identifies some general patterns among the Chinese commanders facing the most powerful militaries in the world for three bloody years. Even if the details might be forgotten in America, Australia or the rest of the world, the war in Korea is by no means forgotten in China.

Mao's decision

Mao Zedong's decision to send Chinese troops into the Korean War has been one of the most debated controversies since the Cold War ended in 1991. Most Chinese military historians argue that Mao made a rational and necessary decision. It was certainly not a mistake. China's intervention secured the nation's north-eastern borders, strengthened Sino-Soviet relations and saved the North Korean regime. China acted as a great power for the first time since it lost the Opium War to Great Britain in 1840. Some historians, however, challenge this view and condemn Mao for gross miscalculation that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers.² Others question whether Mao's war consideration was primarily an ideological or a security concern.³ More scholars debate the timing of Mao's decision-making, whether it occurred in August, September or October.⁴ Their scholarly efforts have laid a solid foundation for a better understanding of the Chinese decision, yet the debate continues.

This new vigour of internationalism revealed a profound change taking place in the 'new China'.

2 For example, Yuan Xi, 'The Truth', *Suibi* [Freelance], no. 6, 1999.

3 Yang Kuisong, 'The ideological elements behind China's decision to send troops to Korea', www.yangkuisong.net; Zhang Baijia, 'How China dealt with the Korean War and Vietnam War', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economy and Politics], no. 3, 2005; Niu Jun, 'Cross the 38th parallel: Political and military considerations and decision for the war to aid Korea and resist the US', *Zhongguo dangshi yanjiu* [CCP History Research], no. 1, 2002.

4 Feng Xianzhi and Li Jie, *Mao Zedong yu kangmei yuanchao* [Mao Zedong and the Resistance against the US and Assistance to Korea], Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe [CCP Central Archival and Manuscript Press], Beijing, 2000, pp. 12–24; Deng Feng, *Lengzhan chuqi dongya guoji guanxi yanjiu* [International Relations in East Asia during the Early Cold War Era], Jiuzhou chubanshe [Jiuzhou Press], Beijing, 2015, pp. 15–17.

Although external Cold War factors might seem the only reasons for this change, in fact the crucial strategic shift came about for significant internal reasons. Modern Chinese history has demonstrated that neither foreign invasion nor the support of an international power can create a strong, centralised national government. Power has depended more on China's own political stability and military strength than on its foreign relations. In this sense, by entering the Korean War, Mao perhaps took the opportunity to continue the communist movement at home and to project the new China's power image abroad.

Mao's strategic priorities included: (1) establishing the legitimacy that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) needed as the ruling party; (2) national security, winning the last battle of the Chinese Civil War against the KMT on Taiwan; (3) economic recovery; and (4) military modernisation. His decision was perhaps also based on the PLA's superiority in manpower, making Mao and his generals overly confident in their capacity to drive the UN forces out of the Korean Peninsula.

The CCP leaders gave credence to the claim that communist China was founded on and could be maintained by virtue of its military power. After October 1949, Chinese leaders redirected their strategic thinking from winning the Chinese Civil War to building up national security. By early 1950, China had the largest army in the world, totalling 5.4 million men, while the US armed forces had 1.5 million and the Soviet Union's forces numbered 2.8 million, growing to 4.8 million by 1953. The PLA transformed itself from a 'liberation army' into a national force with two new goals: a defence force to fight against foreign invasions, and a security force against internal threats to the new regime.

Mao visited the Soviet Union on 16 December 1949, hoping to achieve what the new China desperately needed through an alliance between the PRC and the USSR. The Soviet leader, among other things, wanted to convince Mao that the Soviet Union had its own difficulties and that there would be no free ride for China. First, preoccupied with European affairs, Stalin needed the Chinese to help with ongoing Asian communist revolutions, including the First Indochina War in Vietnam and the national unification of North Korea. Second, Stalin had no intention of challenging the Yalta agreement, which might cause a direct conflict between the two superpowers. In Moscow in February 1950, Mao, Zhou Enlai (China's premier and foreign minister) and Stalin signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance. It ensured

Soviet military assistance if China was invaded by an imperialist power—most likely to be the United States or Japan. From the moment that the new China came into being, Beijing's leaders regarded the United States as China's primary enemy and, at the same time, consistently declared that a fundamental aim of the Chinese revolution was to destroy the old world order dominated by the American imperialists.

On 25 June 1950, the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) launched a surprise attack on South Korea, provoking the Korean War. What most surprised Mao and the Chinese leaders was not the civil war in Korea but the US policy shift from a hands-off policy to a hands-on commitment toward the safety of Taiwan. On 27 June, two days after the North Korean invasion of the South, President Harry S. Truman announced that the US Seventh Fleet would be deployed in the Taiwan Strait to prevent a Chinese communist attack on KMT-held Taiwan. Chinese leaders considered the presence of the Seventh Fleet an intervention in the Chinese Civil War and a direct threat to the new republic.

According to Mao's Cold War theory, there would be a clash between the two countries sooner or later. In the 1950s, the United States intruded into and threatened China's security in three areas: Korea, Vietnam and the Taiwan Strait. Mao described American involvement in the three areas as three knives threatening China: America in Korea was like a knife over her head, America in Taiwan was one around her waist, and Vietnam was one aimed at her feet. Thus Korea, not Taiwan, was considered the most immediate threat, leading Mao to adopt an active defence rather than a reactive strategy. Instead of waiting for US forces to invade Manchuria from North Korea, Mao decided to fight the US force in Korea to prevent an invasion of China. It made sense to the Chinese generals: no matter the outcome of their fighting in Korea, they would not be at risk of losing their country. China's final decision to enter the Korean War was not an easy and rapid process; Mao found it difficult to get other Chinese leaders on board. On 8 October, Mao issued orders reorganising the North-east Border Defence Army (NEBDA) into the Chinese People's Volunteer Force (CPVF; *Zhongguo Renmin Zhiyuanjun*) and appointing Marshal Peng Dehuai as its commander-in-chief and political commissar.

Four offensive campaigns, October 1950 – April 1951

At 5.30 pm on 19 October, the advance guard of the CPVF Fortieth Army removed all identifying Chinese Army insignia from their uniforms, secretly crossed the Yalu River by train over the Andong–Sinuiju Bridge into North Korea, then marched south to meet forward elements of the US I Corps. Before the end of October, two more armies joined the CPVF's first wave, totalling 18 infantry divisions, three artillery divisions and supporting troops—in all about 300,000 men by early November. Late in the month, Chinese forces in Korea totalled 33 divisions and nearly 450,000 men, but this was only the beginning of Chinese involvement. This rapid and unexpected deployment took place without discovery by American forces, since Chinese troops had no trucks and therefore raised no dust. Chinese high command hoped that superior numbers would offset their inferior equipment and technology. It seemed rational to them that a larger force would be a decisive factor for their victory.⁵

The CPVF's first battle in Korea was an unplanned engagement. From 25 October to 5 November, the CPVF's armies had head-on battles with the Republic of Korea's (ROK) 1st, 6th and 8th Divisions, as well as the US 1st Cavalry Division. During this campaign, the CPVF used some of the combat tactics it had perfected during the Chinese Civil War. Among these was the effort to achieve numerical superiority and the element of surprise in order to negate the usually superior enemy firepower. By manoeuvring at night and resting during the day, Peng deployed his first wave of 300,000 Chinese troops south of the Yalu and remained undetected from 19 to 25 October.⁶ During the first campaign on 5 November, the CPVF Command expanded its force from 120,000 men to 150,000 in the area north of the Chongchon River, facing 50,000 UN troops. Peng believed that the first campaign was a victory for the CPVF, despite 10,000 Chinese casualties.⁷

5 Xu Yan, *Mao Zedong yu kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng* [Mao Zedong and the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea], 2nd edn, Jiefangjun [PLA Press], Beijing, 2006, p. 132.

6 CMC document, 'The circular on the combat characteristics of South Korean troops, 30 October 1950', in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao's Manuscripts since 1949], ed. CCP Central Institute of Historical Documents, Zhongyang wenxian [CCP Central Archival and Manuscript Press], Beijing, 1993, vol. 1, pp. 630–1.

7 Xu Yan, *Diyici jiaoliang: Kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng de lishi huigu yu fansi* [The First Encounter: A Historical Retrospective of the War to Resist America and Aid Korea], Zhongguo guangbo dianshi [China's Radio and Television Press], Beijing, 1990, p. 47.

After the first encounter with the Americans, many in the CPVF command believed that the over-reliance of the UN and US forces on technology might be to their disadvantage.⁸ The Chinese troops quickly gained battlefield experience, assisted immensely by a nucleus of career officers and civil war veterans. For the first time since the Inchon landing, the CPVF stabilised the situation for the North Koreans, providing valuable breathing space by pushing the front line south of the Chongchon. Geography favoured the Chinese. The mountains and forest camouflaged their movements and diluted the effectiveness of UN air attacks. The narrow peninsula made it possible to fortify and defend a relatively short front.

On 25 November, the Chinese People's Volunteer Force launched its second offensive campaign to counter MacArthur's 'home by Christmas' offensive. Before this campaign, Peng had 230,000 men on the western front against 130,000 UN troops, and 150,000 men on the eastern front against 90,000 UN troops, a ratio of nearly two to one.⁹ On the whole, the second offensive campaign from 25 November to 24 December was a major victory for the CPVF. US air power forced the Chinese to take to the hills, and much of what the Chinese soldiers required was carried on foot. Most Chinese soldiers had tremendous physical endurance, even though they suffered more than 80,000 casualties.¹⁰ They attacked from the surrounding hills, often establishing roadblocks that not only forced the American troops back but also threatened to cut them off. Amazingly, even in the icy conditions, the Chinese troops found ways of moving artillery to their front-line positions high in the mountains, and in nine days the CPVF pushed the battle line back to the 38th parallel and recaptured Pyongyang, North Korea's capital. The second offensive campaign represented the peak of CPVF performance in the Korean War. Mao's conviction that any battle could be conducted upon the principles of guerrilla warfare dominated Chinese military doctrine during the early offensive campaigns from the autumn of 1950 to the early spring

8 China Academy of Military Science [CAMS], *Zhongguo renmin zhiyuanjun kangmei yuanchao zhanshi* [War Experience of the CPVF in the War to Resist America and Aid Korea], Junshi kexue [Military Science Press], Beijing, 1990, p. 28.

9 Hong Xuezi, *Kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng huiyi* [Recollections of the War to Resist America and Aid Korea], Jiefangjun wenyi [PLA Literature Press], Beijing, 1990, pp. 90–1.

10 Xu, *The First Encounter*, p. 60.

of 1951.¹¹ These large-scale guerrilla tactics, such as encirclement, proved especially effective in their first two offensive campaigns. Back in China, morale was high and support for the war at its peak during this period.

However, the Ninth Army Group was ill-prepared for combat during the second offensive campaign. The troops came from south-eastern China, believing their next target would be Taiwan in the south, not Korea in the north. Dressed in lightweight canvas shoes and quilted cotton uniforms, the troops were not prepared for the bitterly cold Korean winter. Many became ill and were unable to keep up with the armies, which had marched 120 miles in seven days through mountains and forests. One division lost 700 men to severe frostbite during the first week in Korea.¹² On 27 November, the Ninth Army Group ordered an attack on US 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions around the Chosin Reservoir. The attacking force consisted of eight infantry divisions. Some of the tactics were very successful during the initial attack. First, they achieved a surprise since the Ninth Army Group's entry into North Korea on 11 November, and movement to the eastern front had remained undetected for 10 days. Second, the three Chinese armies had split the US 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions into five parts by the next morning. Third, the 100,000-strong Ninth Army Group was able to surround these fragmented American troops.¹³ Even though the Chinese trapped the 1st Marines at Hahwaok-ri (Hagaru-ri) and divided the division into three sections, they could not destroy each section completely. After being divided and surrounded, the 1st Marine Division immediately formed defensive perimeters at three locations. They also constructed a makeshift airstrip for resupply of ammunition and winter equipment, as well as for shipping out their wounded. On 29 November the Marines counter-attacked to break the Chinese encirclement and to unite their scattered units. On 12 December, having broken the Chinese roadblocks to fight through some attacks on its way to the south, the 1st Marine Division met the US 3rd Infantry Division at Hamhung. The Ninth Army Group

11 Xiaobing Li, A.R. Millett and Bin Yu (trans. and eds), *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 2001, p. 14.

12 Cui Xianghua and Chen Dapeng, *Tao Yong jiangjun zhuan* [Biography of General Tao Yong], Jiefangjun [PLA Press], Beijing, 1989, p. 393.

13 Captain Wang Xuedong, interview, Harbin, April 2000. See also Wang, 'The Chosin Reservoir', in *Voices from the Korean War*, ed. R. Peters and Xiaobing Li, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 2004, pp. 117–24.

could not annihilate the 1st Marine Division. During its battle at the Chosin Reservoir, the Ninth Army Group lost 40,000 men in three weeks of fighting, which liquidated three divisions.¹⁴

On New Year's Eve, the CPVF, while still poorly provisioned (home-supplied food met only a quarter of the minimum needs of the CPVF), launched the third offensive campaign across the 38th parallel against entrenched UN forces, an operation dissimilar to earlier practices. In a matter of nine days, from 31 December 1950 to 8 January 1951, the CPVF crossed the 38th parallel, moved into South Korea, recaptured Seoul and pushed the UN force down to the 37th parallel.¹⁵ The CPVF also faced mounting problems that went beyond the shortages of food and ammunition. CPVF units were exhausted after days of constant movement and fighting, and reinforcements had been delayed. The CPVF and NKPA lost 8,500 men during the third offensive campaign.¹⁶ By this time the US and UN forces had mobilised overwhelming firepower superiority on the ground and in the air, inflicting heavy casualties and serious damage on the CPVF troop movements as well as on their transportation and communication lines. The CPVF needed a more cautious strategy after the third offensive campaign.

Nevertheless, Stalin and Kim Il-Sung pressured the CPVF to launch the next offensive operation immediately in order to drive the UN forces out of Korea with all possible speed. Mao also cabled Peng in January, urging preparation of a fourth campaign to drive the UN forces further south. The CPVF command was under tremendous pressure from the political leaders of all three communist countries for a quick victory. The gap between this political goal and strategic realities became wider at the end of each campaign.¹⁷

14 CMC document, 'Telegram to Song Shilun, and others, 17 December 1950', in *Mao Zedong junshi wenxuan* [Selected Military Papers of Mao Zedong], Jiefangjun zhanshi [PLA Soldiers Press], Beijing, 1981, vol. 2, pp. 682–3.

15 Xiaobing Li, 'China's intervention and the CPVF experience in the Korean War', in *The Korean War at Fifty: International Perspectives*, ed. M.F. Wilkinson, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA, 2004, pp. 144–5.

16 CAMS, *War Experience of the CPVF*, p. 48.

17 Xiaobing Li, 'Chinese Army in the Korean War, 1950–1953', *New England Journal of History* 60, nos 1–3, 2003–04, p. 282.

From 25 January to 21 April, as the CPVF engaged in its fourth campaign in a series of back-and-forth mobile battles,¹⁸ the UN forces appeared to have recovered from their early surprise. On 25 January, US Eighth Army commander Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway launched a counter-attack by leading four US divisions, two British brigades, one Turkish brigade and two Republic of Korea divisions in a two-pronged offensive towards Seoul. The CPVF commanders were unprepared for the UNF's quick transformation from being on the defensive in early January to the large-scale offensive less than two weeks later.¹⁹ The CPVF command deployed its Fiftieth and Thirty-Eighth Armies to build up a defence on the southern bank of the Han River to stop Ridgway's northern advance. The Fiftieth, formerly the KMT Sixtieth Army of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), which had surrendered to the PLA in the civil war, faced a significant challenge, barely surviving the first week of defence. US Eighth Army forces broke through the Fiftieth Army's defence line on 7 February, forcing the Chinese to retreat north of the Han River.²⁰ From 7 to 26 February, the Chinese Thirty-Eighth Army stood alone against the US 24th and 1st Cavalry Divisions, suffering heavy casualties. The Chinese Thirty-Eighth Army's 112th Division lost two of its three regiments (the 334th and 336th) in less than 10 days, causing the 38th to give up its defensive positions on 18 February and to withdraw to the north of the Han River.²¹

To alleviate the pressure on the defence of the Han River in the west, the CPVF command ordered six armies to attack the ROK divisions in the east. On 11 February, the Chinese Thirty-Ninth, Fortieth and Forty-Second Armies mounted a massive attack on the ROK 8th Division at Hoensong, while the Sixty-Sixth Army was despatched to envelop the ROK rear and II and V Corps of the NKPA were sent to block the ROK 5th Division's reinforcement.²² The ROK 8th Division collapsed, creating a salient in the UN forces' front. The US Eighth Army's 2nd Division and

18 Xu, *The First Encounter*, p. 80.

19 Hong, *Hong Xuezhong Huiyilu* [Memoirs of Hong Xuezhong], 2nd edn, Jiefangjun [PLA Press], Beijing, 2007, p. 448.

20 Yonghui Jiang, *Sanshiba jun zai chaoxian* [The 38th Army in Korea], Liaoning renmin [Liaoning People's Press], Shenyang, 1992, pp. 301, 363; B.C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950–July 1951: US Army in the Korean War*, US Army Center of Military History, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1990, pp. 253–4.

21 Jiang, *The 38th Army in Korea*, pp. 301, 327–32, 405–8.

22 Guo Baoheng and Hu Zhiyuan, *Chipin hanjiang nanbei: 42 jun zai chaoxian* [Fighting over the South and North of the Han River: The 42nd Army in Korea], Liaoning renmin [Liaoning People's Press], Shenyang, 1996, pp. 212–21.

the US 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team supporting the ROK divisions struggled to block the CPVF–NKPA penetration at Wonju. The CPVF attack was successfully halted. On 13 February, at Chipyeong-ni, a small town west of Hoensong, three CPVF divisions attacked the US 23rd Regiment and the French battalion, which totalled 6,000 UN troops. US General Ridgway believed that this was a key junction and ordered the defenders to hold it against 32,000 Chinese troops. For two days the Chinese mounted attack after attack against the UN positions, but the defenders refused to surrender. The CPVF was unable to organise another effective attack by 15 February, making the battle of Chipyeong-ni a serious setback for the Chinese. Some UN officers considered it the turning point in the Chinese intervention, comparable to the Inchon landing during the North Korean offensive in 1950. The failed attack exposed the CPVF's weakness and convinced US policy-makers that the UN forces could stop the Chinese offensives and stabilise the situation in Korea. The US State Department agreed with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at a meeting in February: 'Generally speaking, military operations in Korea are now stabilized, although there will be a certain amount of give and take ... [the current] positions are likely to remain approximately as they are now.'²³

Unable to break through the US Eighth Army line in central Korea while trying to hold back an Eighth Army drive west of the penetration, on 17 February Peng decided that the CPVF would withdraw to the 38th parallel while organising a few defensive engagements to slow down the UN forces' drive.²⁴ To make sure Mao understood his difficulties, Peng rushed back to Beijing on 21 February and briefed Mao himself. When Peng pointed out that the Korean War could not be a quick victory,²⁵ Mao agreed and told Peng, 'Win a quick victory if you can; if you can't, win a slow one'. Peng was relieved to find that Mao had become strategically flexible for the fourth campaign.²⁶ By March 1951, Mao's strategic goal in the war had changed from driving the UN forces

23 US State Department, 'Memorandum for the record of a Department of State–Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting, 13 February 1953', *Korea and China*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, vol. 7, p. 177.

24 Wang Yan, *Peng Dehuai zhuan* [Biography of Peng Dehuai], Dang dai Zhongguo [Contemporary China Press], Beijing, 1993, p. 449.

25 Peng, 'My story of the Korean War', in *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, ed. Li, Millett and Yu, p. 35.

26 Shuguang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1992, p. 143.

out of the peninsula for a quick victory to a prolonged war with the goal of eliminating several UN divisions a year. Mao believed that it would 'take several years to inflict casualties of hundreds of thousands of American troops to make them [the United States] beat a retreat in the face of difficulties'.²⁷ The campaign's goal shifted from a total Chinese victory to a US withdrawal from Korea.

The US forces, however, showed no sign whatsoever of a withdrawal, and instead intensified their northward offensives. On 7 March, the US Eighth Army launched its offensive in the west. The CPVF command ordered a further withdrawal to north of the 38th parallel, and UN forces captured the battered capital of Seoul for the second time. By early April, UN troops had reached the Kansas Line, a few miles north of the 38th parallel. For the UN forces, however, attention now shifted from battlefield to politics: the Truman–MacArthur controversy. On 11 April 1951, Truman relieved MacArthur of command. On 21 April, CPVF troops disengaged after the UN forces stopped their northern advance at positions along the 38th parallel. The Chinese fourth campaign had lasted for 87 days. The CPVF and NKPA suffered total casualties of 53,000 men; of these, the Chinese lost 42,000 and listed 4,379 as missing in action.²⁸ All China's troops were ground forces, since the CPVF air force had not yet been formally committed to the war.²⁹

The decisive battle: The 1951 Spring Offensive campaign

Not until after the CPVF's Fifth Phase Offensive campaign in April–May 1951 did Mao conclude that the goal of driving the UN forces out of Korea was unattainable. In April, considerable disagreement emerged among CPVF officers as to how to execute the fifth campaign. Most of the top commanders disagreed with Peng's idea (imposed upon him by Mao, Kim and Stalin) of striking south.

27 Peng, 'My story of the Korean War'.

28 CAMS, *War Experience of the CPVF*, p. 85.

29 Xiaoming Zhang, *Red Wings Over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union, and the Air War in Korea*, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX, 2002, pp. 145–6.

To ensure a victory in their fifth offensive campaign, Mao and the Central Military Commission (CMC) decided to send China's second echelon to Korea, including nine armies with 27 infantry divisions.³⁰ (The first echelon of the CPVF was nine armies with 30 infantry divisions and three artillery divisions, which had been engaged in Korea since October 1950.³¹) The main strength of the second echelon was the Third Army Group from south-west China, including three armies with nine infantry divisions,³² and the Nineteenth Army Group from northern China, also comprising three armies with nine infantry divisions.³³ When the second echelon arrived, the CPVF forces in Korea had doubled from 450,000 troops in January to 950,000 by mid-April, including 770,000 combat troops in 42 infantry divisions, eight artillery divisions and four anti-aircraft artillery divisions.³⁴ The NKPA had about 340,000 troops reorganised into six army corps, bringing communist forces to almost 1.3 million troops. The UN forces comprised about 340,000 men, including 150,000 Americans, 130,000 South Koreans and 40,000 troops from other countries including Great Britain and Australia.³⁵ Thus, by the eve of their next campaign, the Chinese ground forces alone had a numerical superiority of three to one against the UN ground forces. Peng made it clear to his generals on 14 March that 'the next campaign will be the decisive battle' of the Korean War.³⁶

During their planning, the Chinese high command appeared confident of eliminating a large number of UN troops and moving the CPVF into the areas south of the 38th parallel. Mao, Peng and most of the Chinese generals believed that the human factor would determine their victory in the decisive battle. Mao firmly believed that a weak army could win in a war against a strong enemy since he was convinced that man could

30 Mao's telegram to 'Filippov' (Stalin), 1 March 1951, in *Mao's Manuscripts Since 1949*, vol. 2, p. 152.

31 Xu Yan, 'Chinese forces and their casualties in the Korean War', in *Chinese Historians 6*, trans. Xiaobing Li, pp. 48–9; R.E. Appleman, *US Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktun, North to the Yalu (June–November 1950)*, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 1961, pp. 768–9.

32 CMC's telegram to Peng, Song [Shilun], Tao [Yong] and PLA regional commands on 18 February 1951, 'Some changes in CPVF armies rotation plan in Korea', in *Zhou Enlai junshi wenxuan* [Selected Military Papers of Zhou Enlai], Renmin [People's Press], Beijing, 1997, vol. 4, pp. 158–61.

33 CMC telegram to Peng Dehuai on 11 February 1951, 'The counter-attack plan and advance of the 19th Army Group', in *Selected Military Papers of Zhou Enlai*, vol. 4, pp. 154–6.

34 Hong, *Memoir of Hong Xuezhai*, pp. 464–5.

35 Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, p. 437.

36 Peng, 'Speech at the CPVF Army and Division Commanders Meeting, 14 October 1950', in *Peng Dehuai junshi wenxuan* [Selected Military Papers of Peng Dehuai], Zhongyang wenxian [CCP Central Archival and Manuscript Press], Beijing, 1988, p. 324.

beat a weapon. 'Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor,' Mao wrote. He explicitly made the distinction that 'it is people, not things, that are decisive'.³⁷

Mao's confidence in a human being's subjective capability to determine defeat or victory in war made sense to the Chinese officers and soldiers. Shaped by the military culture and communist ideology, the Chinese belief in the superiority of humans over technology suggests their unique attitude towards war and ways to fight a battle. The idea that a soldier or a warrior, because of his godliness and virtue, can vanquish stronger opponents is a strong tradition in Chinese culture. The Chinese high command might have found and used a principle of the Sunzi (Sun-tzu): 'Throw [your soldiers] where there is no escape. And they will fight with the courage of the heroes.'³⁸

On 22 April 1951, Peng launched the Spring Offensive campaign, which became the largest battle in the PLA's history. The Chinese offensive can be divided into three phases. The first step was the CPVF attack on the US I and IX Corps, to be carried out in the west from 22 to 29 April; the second was the Chinese attack on the US X Corps, to be carried out in the east from 8 to 21 May. The third step was the Chinese withdrawal and defence, to take place from 23 May to 10 June.

At 5 pm on 22 April, the CPVF Ninth Army Group, totalling 250,000 men, launched attacks into the centre of the US IX Corps, and the campaign began. The five armies of the Ninth Army Group attacked a 28-kilometre UN defence line held by the ROK 6th Division, the US 24th and 25th Divisions and the US 1st Marine Division. The Chinese 39th and 40th Armies broke through the UN line held by the ROK 6th Division, penetrating into the central mountainous areas. They separated the Koreans from the Marines and divided the western UN divisions from those on the eastern front. To cut off the US 24th Division's retreat, the Chinese Fortieth Army sent its divisions to attack the British 27th Brigade at the road junction at Kapyong. However, the attacking Chinese troops faced a strong defence by the brigade's 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR). The Chinese divisions could not prevent the US 24th from breaking through their roadblocks nor from withdrawing south.

37 Mao, 'On Protracted War', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1965, vol. 2, pp. 143–4.

38 Ibid.

At 7 pm on 22 April, the CPVF Third and Nineteenth Army Groups, totalling 270,000 men, launched attacks against the US I Corps in the west. Their armies, however, were not ready for such a large-scale offensive and failed to break through the defence lines of the ROK 1st Division and the British 29th Infantry Brigade. At the time Peng issued his order, many troops of the Third Army Group were not yet in their staging positions and had to run for 30 to 60 minutes before they reached their staging positions. This meant that the attacking forces were unable to use artillery barrage against the UN forces' defence. Even after the artillery fire had extended into the UN positions, some of the infantry troops were still unable to reach their staging positions. The main strength of the Nineteenth Army Group did not penetrate deeply enough into the US I Corps' rear and did not reach Uijongbu to complete the encirclement of the US 3rd, 24th and 25th Divisions. This failure made it impossible for Peng to achieve his goal of annihilation, and some of his armies did not perform as well as they did during the Chinese Civil War.

With the UN forces heavily concentrated in the west around Seoul, the east was primarily defended by the ROK troops. Sensing an opportunity in early May, Peng ordered 200,000 troops, including 15 CPVF infantry divisions from the Third and Ninth Army Groups and five NKPA divisions, to attack the ROK 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th Divisions and US X Corps between 8 and 21 May as the second step of the Spring Offensive campaign. The shock of the Chinese attack caused panic in ROK units, many of which abandoned their defensive positions and fell back. A huge gap opened up on the US X Corps' right flank. Six CPVF divisions struck the US 2nd Division to the left of the salient at Hyeongri, but the US division held its ground and even pushed into the flank of the attacking Chinese forces, as air and artillery pounded the densely concentrated CPVF units. Simultaneously, the US 3rd Division shifted from the Seoul area to block further CPVF movement.

Although the CPVF forces were still managing to continue their attacks, they had run out of strength at nearly every position across the line. After fighting almost uninterruptedly throughout two major offensive operations within one month, all the front-line forces were tremendously battle-fatigued and exhausted. Some of the front-line forces had completely run out of ammunition and food, and many others were approaching the same situation. On 21 May, the CPVF–NKPA joint command issued the order to halt attacks and to conclude the second step of the fifth offensive campaign. On the night of 23 May, the main forces of the Chinese People's

Volunteer Force and the North Korean People's Army began withdrawing to the north while forces assigned to defensive missions began to move into their designated positions.

US Lieutenant General Van Fleet ordered all-out counter-attacks just two days after the CPVF ended its offensive operations, completely catching the Chinese forces by surprise. Peng had expected that the UN forces would launch their counter-attacks no earlier than 10–15 days after the Chinese had stopped their offensive operations. Van Fleet assembled 14 divisions, one brigade and two regiments to launch frontal attacks on the CPVF line of defence. He left three divisions and three brigades in reserve. Most of the US forces launched their full-scale attacks during daylight on 23 May, seven days after the CPVF had initiated its attacks on Hyeongri. This was the UN forces' new strategy: to attack the Sino-North Korean forces on the day their hand-carried supplies would run out.

At that point, 90 per cent of the Chinese forces had nearly exhausted their food supplies and matériel, and were preparing to withdraw to the north. The UN forces' main attacks at the middle and eastern front began at the same time as the CPVF and NKPA were beginning to pull their forces out of combat operations. Moving along the highways, with tank units spearheading the advance, the mechanised UN forces advanced northward more rapidly than the Chinese and North Korean commanders expected. The CPVF formations were badly disrupted by the thrusting UN attacks, especially since they were unable to move during daylight for fear of coming under aerial assault. The Chinese Third Army Group was thrown into chaos and disorder. Its Sixtieth Army failed to mount a defence to cover the Army Group withdrawing to the north. The 180th Division of the Sixtieth Army, deployed in the centre of the Sixtieth's defence, was unable to stop the US attacks and was cut off by the UN forces. By 29 May, the 180th Division had collapsed: only 4,000 troops eventually broke out and returned home. From a roster of 12,000 men, the division lost more than 8,000, including 5,000 captured. It was the largest single loss of the CPVF in the Korean War.

The 1-million-men offensive had failed. The CPVF lost the decisive battle and suffered 85,000 casualties. More important, the front line was pushed farther north. Among the major reasons for the early Chinese setback between 22 and 29 April were certainly that the UN and US forces had established overwhelming firepower superiority on the ground and in the air, and that the UN was inflicting heavy casualties and serious damage

on CPVF troops, transportation and logistical supplies. In retrospect, the CPVF command had miscalculated the campaign situation and made three major strategic mistakes. First, Peng and his commanders did not sufficiently prepare their striking forces, rushing them to the offensive. Second, Peng used the same strategy of divide, encircle and annihilate as in the four previous campaigns from November 1950 to April 1951, failing to develop new strategies and tactics for the Spring Offensive. Third, the CPVF command did not improve its methods of transportation or of maintaining supplies. The 1-million-strong CPVF–NKPA offensive campaign caused few losses and minimal damage to the UN forces, but produced unusually high casualties in the Chinese forces, especially the Third and Nineteenth Army Groups. Peng admitted later that the early attack was one of only four major strategic mistakes he had made during his military career.³⁹ After the collapse of the Spring Offensive campaign, Mao pointed out three major reasons for the CPVF failure: ‘too much haste, too large scale, and too far into the [enemy’s] territory’.⁴⁰

Mao was right about two of the problems the CPVF faced in late April, as it had launched an immense offensive with neither necessary preparation nor sufficient supplies. But he was wrong about being too far into the enemy’s territory, since no CPVF force had ever advanced more than 50 miles (80 kilometres) into UN-held territory in the Spring Offensive campaign. In fact, it was because of their slow movement and lack of deep penetration that the Chinese armies failed to encircle and annihilate the US I Corps. Mao criticised his rigid campaign strategy as another reason for the Chinese setback between 22 and 29 April. In retrospect, Mao’s strategy—divide, encircle and annihilate—was inflexible as well as out of date, leading to the disastrous result of the CPVF offensive.

Encirclement and annihilation had proved effective in the first two CPVF campaigns from October to December 1950. The Chinese forces were able to launch surprise attacks, then flank and encircle on both sides one UN unit, cut off its connection and set up roadblocks to stop its withdrawal. During the second offensive campaign in November–December 1949, the Ninth Army Group scored the CPVF’s only major encirclement and annihilation success during the three-year war.

39 Xie Lifu, *Chaoxian zhanzheng shilu* [Historical Records of the Korean War], World Knowledge Press, Beijing, 1993, pp. 456–8.

40 Du Ping, *Zai zhiyuanjun zongbu: Du Ping huiyilu* [At the CPVF General HQ: Memoirs of Du Ping], Jiefangjun [PLA Press], Beijing, 1988, p. 250.

In early 1951, however, the UN forces had figured out how to deal with the Chinese strategy. They no longer retreated on discovering Chinese troops on both sides or behind. Instead, they quickly reorganised their troops into a stronghold protected by tanks and self-propelling artillery guns. Thomas Fleming points out that ‘Ridgway ordered that no unit be abandoned if cut off. It was to be “fought for” and rescued unless a “major commander” after “personal appraisal” Ridgway-style—from the front lines—decided its relief would cost as many or more men’. When UN units were under attack, they called in air raids and artillery, which inflicted such heavy casualties on the attacking Chinese troops that they had to withdraw after a few assaults. The UN operations of attrition under Ridgway’s command were very different from its earlier rapid advances for a quick victory, as practised by MacArthur.⁴¹

The CCP leadership and the high command of the People’s Liberation Army realised the limit of China’s military power after their troops lost their fifth offensive campaign in the spring of 1951. The communists never again came as close to Seoul, nor mounted another major southward incursion. Their defeat forced Mao to reconsider his political and military aims. Realising the huge gap between China’s capabilities and its ambitious aim of driving the UN forces from the peninsula, the Chinese leadership was forced to accept a settlement without total victory. The fifth offensive campaign was the decisive battle as well as the turning point that shaped not only the remainder of the war but also truce negotiations.

Negotiating while fighting: Trench warfare, 1951–53

After that setback, in order to limit casualties and negate the UN forces’ firepower, the CPVF command adopted positional warfare, focusing on more cautious defensive tactics. By the summer of 1951, the nature of the war had changed from a large-scale mobile war to a stalemate and trench warfare. Until 1953, Chinese commanders shifted their focus from eliminating enemy units in mobile warfare to securing lines. In a limited battleground such as Korea, it was difficult for either side to overpower its opponent completely, unlike the situations in both the Second World

41 W.T. Bowers (ed.), *Combat in Korea: Striking Back, March–April 1951*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 2010, pp. 408–9.

War and the Chinese Civil War. Chinese leaders changed their goal from driving UN forces out of Korea to merely defending China's security and ending the war through negotiations.

By the summer of 1951, the CPVF was no longer expected to recapture Seoul and move into South Korea. While the armies could achieve temporary success in limited sectors, it came at a high cost. The Soviets were ready for peace talks that would secure North Korea's regime and strengthen the Soviet Union's position in Asia. On 23 June the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations, Yakov Malik, called for discussions on a ceasefire as well as an armistice to end the Korean conflict. In Beijing, the Central Committee discussed the Soviet proposal as well as its next step in Korea. Most committee members considered it proper that the Chinese forces should stop at the 38th parallel but continue to fight while working toward a negotiated settlement. They believed they had already achieved their political goal of driving the enemy out of northern Korea. The pause at the 38th parallel, in fact, was a return to the pre-war status quo that was acceptable to the parties in the war. Presided over by Mao on 2 July, the CMC committed to this 'dual strategy' for the rest of the war.⁴² The Chinese had convinced the North Koreans of this new strategy during their visits and communications in the summer of 1951.⁴³ When Beijing's *People's Daily* endorsed the Soviet proposal, it appeared that the key players in all the warring powers, except South Korea, were ready to negotiate.⁴⁴

On 10 July truce negotiations began at Kaesong, a neutral city between the lines. The UN delegation, however, soon discovered that the Chinese and North Korean delegation was more interested in using the event for propaganda purposes than in negotiating. During the early weeks of the meetings, there was major disagreement over the demarcation line. In August negotiations were suspended. On 25 October, talks resumed at the village of Panmunjom, 8 kilometres from Kaesong. From late 1951 to early 1952, the issue of prisoners of war deadlocked the negotiations. The UN delegation proposed a 'voluntary repatriation' of prisoners, while

42 Mao, 'Telegram to Peng Dehuai, 2 July 1951', in *Mao's Manuscripts since 1949*, vol. 2, pp. 379–80.

43 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Lee Xiangchao's visit to Beijing, 17 February 1953', p. 15; '[Zhou Enlai's] Speech (draft) at the third anniversary of the Korean War, 24 June 1953', pp. 24–5, File no. 106-00034-01 (1), Foreign Ministry Archives.

44 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Lee Xiangchao's visit to Beijing, 17 February 1953', p. 25.

the Chinese and North Korean delegation insisted on the return of their prisoners. The UN delegation believed that the communists held more prisoners (estimated at 65,000) than the 11,559 they admitted to at the negotiating table.⁴⁵

In the meantime, fighting continued. After the end of 1951, when the two sides agreed on the demarcation line, the nature of the war changed. Chinese soldiers did not realise that the war had moved into a period of stalemate and trench warfare.⁴⁶ Much bloody fighting lay ahead, but the front lines remained essentially unchanged. Both sides dug in and prepared to stay. In the autumn of 1951, the CPVF had begun an active defence by constructing underground tunnels to strengthen the CPVF defensive capacity and to achieve a favourable negotiating position. The 'underground Great Wall', as it became known, was built along the front line.⁴⁷ The Chinese commanders' strategy placed its main emphasis on gaining and retaining the operational initiative in battles. Their trench defence and tunnel system were tested by the sudden onset of the UN forces' Kumhwa offensive in mid-October 1952. The US 7th and ROK 2nd Divisions began intensive shelling of the Chinese Fifteenth Army's positions in the Osong Mountain region on 14 October, and occupied Hills 597.9 and 537.7, two small features collectively known as Triangle Hill. By 16 October, the UN attack had forced the Chinese troops off the ridge and into their tunnels. The 45th Division of the CPVF Fifteenth Army, as the defensive force on the hills, fought a pattern of see-saw actions.⁴⁸ During the day, UN troops would force Chinese troops into the tunnels; at night the Chinese would counter-attack and recover their surface positions, only to lose them again the following day. The Battle of Triangle Hill turned into one of the bloodiest of the war. The 45th Division lost 5,200 soldiers on the two hills. The Fifteenth Army suffered a total of 11,400 casualties from late October until early November, when the Battle of Triangle Hill finally came to an end.⁴⁹

45 Chai Chengwen and Zhao Yongtian, *Banmendian tanpan* [The Panmunjom Negotiations], Jiefangjun [PLA Press], Beijing, 1992, pp. 200–3.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

47 Xu, *The First Encounter*, pp. 122–5.

48 Captain Zheng Yanman, interview, Harbin, Heilongjiang, August 2002. Also see Zheng, 'The Chinese go underground', in *Voices From the Korean War*, ed. Peters and Li, pp. 177–8.

49 Captain Zheng Yanman, interview, Harbin, Heilongjiang, August 2002.

By December 1952, Chinese forces in Korea had reached a record high of 1.45 million men, including 59 infantry divisions, 10 artillery divisions, five anti-aircraft divisions and seven tank regiments. CPVF numbers remained stable until the armistice agreement was signed in July 1953. Mao committed nearly a quarter of China's military strength to North Korea's defence.⁵⁰ Until the end of the war, the CPVF maintained a relatively stable front line, increased CPVF air force, artillery and tank units, and strengthened logistical support. Indeed, the CPVF increasingly became a mirror image of its US counterpart in its prosecution of the war. The Korean War kickstarted China's military modernisation and professionalism in terms of command, organisation, technology and training. In this respect, the United States turned out to be a 'useful adversary' in the Korean War.⁵¹ For instance, Chinese forces gained experience in joint operations, although these did not take place until the last phase of the war. The first joint effort took place on 30 November 1951, when Chinese forces launched an amphibious attack, supported by aircraft, on Dahoo Island, off North Korea's coast. Although the CPVF lost five of nine bombers during the joint attack, the landing succeeded.⁵²

Starting in the fall of 1952, the PLA began to rotate Chinese troops into Korea to gain modern fighting experience against US forces while providing much-needed recuperation for CPVF troops there. The Chinese Army had previously fought the Japanese Army and the Chinese Nationalist Army, but its leaders knew little about the US, British, Canadian and other technologically equipped Western forces. Korea became a combat laboratory offering Chinese officers and soldiers essential combat training. By the end of the war, about 73 per cent of Chinese infantry troops had been rotated (25 out of 34 armies, or 79 of 109 infantry divisions). More than 52 per cent of Chinese air force divisions, 55 per cent of tank units, 67 per cent of artillery divisions and 100 per cent of railroad engineering divisions had been sent to Korea.

By the end of the war, the Chinese People's Volunteer Force was emphasising the role of technology and firepower, and the People's Liberation Army respected their technologically superior opponents. To narrow the technology gap, China purchased weapons and equipment

50 Xu, 'Chinese forces and their casualties in the Korean War', pp. 52–3.

51 T.J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilisation, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996, pp. 1–2.

52 Li, 'Chinese Army in the Korean War, 1950–1953', p. 286.

from the Soviet Union to arm 60 infantry divisions during 1951–53.⁵³ Thereafter, Chinese weaponry became standardised. The Soviets also transferred technology for the production of rifles, machine guns and artillery pieces. In 1952, the Central Military Committee made its first Five-Year Plan for National Defence, emphasising air force, artillery and tank force development.⁵⁴ Additionally, Chinese and North Korean armies received foreign aid from Eastern European countries such as Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia.⁵⁵ Romania provided 41 railcars of war materials for the North Korean and Chinese troops in April 1951, including hospital equipment (two railcars) and medicine (10 railcars) for a 100-bed hospital, as well as 22 medical personnel.⁵⁶

The CPVF improved its logistics and transportation by establishing its own logistics department in Korea in the spring of 1951. General Hong Xuezhì (Hong Hsue-ch'i) set up a new configuration system that fitted the CPVF's needs for its new positional warfare doctrine. This new system was aimed at supplying directly to front locations rather than to specific army units.⁵⁷ Food and ammunition always lagged behind operations.⁵⁸ Hong's new logistics system established area supply depots along the front lines, servicing all troops stationed within that area. The troops moved in and out, but the area supply depot remained and could be used by both Chinese and North Korean troops.⁵⁹ The new system improved CPVF logistics capacity at regimental and battalion levels, and increased the front-line troops' combat effectiveness. Chinese solutions to battlefield problems were not elegant, but they were effective.

53 Xu Xiangqian, 'The purchase of arms from Moscow', in *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, ed. Li, Millett and Yu, p. 53.

54 Peng, 'China's military experience in the past four years and the fundamental issues for our future military development', in *Selected Military Papers of Peng Dehuai*, pp. 474–6.

55 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Documents of transporting Poland's first and second shipments of aiding North Korea materials through China, 20 April to 25 October 1951', File no. 109-00161-02 (1), Foreign Ministry Archives.

56 Ministry of Railroad Transportation, 'Reports and documents on assisting Romania transport aiding North Korea materials, 9 April to 4 May 1951', File no. 109-00144-02 (1).

57 Nie, 'Beijing's decision to intervene', in *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, ed. Li, Millett and Yu, p. 53.

58 Colonel Wang Po, interview, PLA Logistics College, Beijing, July 1994.

59 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Foreign Affairs Office, Teng Daiyuan to Li Kenong, 'About the rail cars in north-east China halted by the North Korean People's Army, 29 June 1951', File no. 106-00026-02 (1), Foreign Ministry Archives.

The role of air power

In July 1949, the CMC had signed a deal with the Soviet Union to sell 434 military aircraft to the PLA and send 878 aviation experts to China, enabling the establishment of the PLA Air Force. In October the CMC established seven new aviation schools, and on 11 November 1949 the PLA proclaimed the establishment of the Chinese People's Air Force,⁶⁰ whose development sped up after the outbreak of the Korean War. Its first division, the Air Force 4th Division, was formed in Nanjing in June 1950, the 3rd was formed in Shenyang in October and the 2nd was formed in Shanghai in November. Each division had three to four regiments, each regiment had four wing commands (*dadui*, battalion) and each wing command had eight to 10 fighters.⁶¹ The 4th Division was the first air force division deployed on the Korean front, and served under CPVF command from January to September 1951.⁶² The 2nd, 3rd, 8th and 10th Divisions joined the 4th in November; seven more air force divisions participated in the war through 1953, a total of 60,000 personnel, including pilots, ground personnel and security troops. These air force divisions kept their bases in China proper, while their Soviet-trained pilots flew into Korea to carry out their missions. Soviet air force officers also coordinated Chinese and North Korean air cooperation. By the end of 1953 the PLA had 3,000 fighters and bombers, establishing China's air force as the third largest in the world.⁶³

'The Soviet air force (Voemo-Vozushnye Sily; VVS) also participated in the Korean War. General Belov arrived in north-east China in August 1950 with one Soviet air force division; 12 more arrived in China within the next three months, under his command. Their mission was to protect the Yalu bridges, power plants, railroads and airports in an area 50 miles (80 kilometres) south of the Chinese–North Korean border. However, at Stalin's insistence, Russian pilots who flew into Korea had to take off from China. They wore Chinese uniforms and swore never to tell of their Korean War service. They were not allowed to communicate in Russian while airborne and, most importantly, they were not to be taken prisoner,

60 Wang Dinglie, *Dangdai Zhongguo kongjun* [The PLA Air Force in Contemporary China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue [China Social Science Press], 1989), pp. 17–25.

61 Zhang, *Red Wings Over the Yalu*, pp. 224–46.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 146–8.

63 Zhang, 'Air combat for the People's Republic', in *Chinese Warfighting*, ed. Ryan, Finkelstein and McDevitt, p. 278.

and were prepared to commit suicide. All Russian aircraft were repainted with Chinese or North Korean marks. On 1 November 1950, seven days after the Chinese engaged the UN forces, Russian fighters began patrolling Korean air space. On that first day, six Yak-9 fighters engaged US fighters and bombers over the Anzhou area, with the Russians claiming to have shot down two B-29 bombers and one Mustang fighter while losing two Russian Yak-9s.⁶⁴ General Belov reported to Stalin that his pilots had shot down 23 US aircraft in the first half of November. Stalin was impressed and, as a result, sent 120 newly designed MiG-15 jet fighters to the Korean War.

In January 1951, when three Chinese offensive campaigns had pushed the front southward to the 37th parallel, Peng requested an extension of Soviet air coverage further south to protect the CPVF transportation and communication lines. Stalin immediately agreed and ordered Belov to transfer two more Russian fighter divisions, the 151st and 324th Divisions of the 64th Air Force Army, into North Korea. On 15 March, Stalin telegraphed Mao, informing him that two more fighter divisions would be transferred from China to North Korea.⁶⁵ By August, the 64th Air Force Army had deployed 190 MiG-15s and two anti-aircraft artillery divisions to North Korea. Still, Russian aircraft were not authorised to fly over UN-controlled areas, nor be engaged over the front, nor fly south of the 39th parallel. The CPVF Command complained about these restrictions, as Russian fighters were prevented from supporting Chinese ground operations, and no Russian bombers, which were most needed, took part in the war. Chinese forces suffered casualties caused by friendly fire from the Russian fighters, including two Chinese aircraft that were mistakenly shot down by Russian fighters.

But Stalin had his own considerations: the Soviet Union did not want a war with the United States over Korea, nor anywhere in east Asia. The Soviet Union had done what it could for the Koreans. From November 1950 to July 1953, 12 Soviet air force divisions engaged in the war, a total of 72,000 Russian personnel, including pilots, technicians, ground service and anti-air defence troops. Russian involvement peaked in 1952, with 26,000 Russian air force personnel sent into North Korea. According to Soviet official statistics, Soviet fighters shot down 1,097 UN

64 Shen, *Mao, Stalin and the Korean War*, p. 330.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 334–5.

aircraft,⁶⁶ and anti-aircraft artillery forces shot down 212. The Soviet air force lost 335 fighters and 120 pilots, with a total of 299 deaths in the Korean War.⁶⁷

From 19 October 1950 to 27 July 1953, confronted by US air and naval superiority, Chinese volunteer forces suffered heavy casualties; one was Mao's son, a Russian translator at the CPVF headquarters, who died in an air raid. According to Chinese military records, Chinese casualties in the Korean War break down as follows: 152,000 dead, 383,000 wounded, 450,000 hospitalised, 21,300 prisoners of war and 4,000 missing in action—a total of 1,010,700 casualties.⁶⁸ Chinese soldiers who served in the Korean War faced a greater chance of being killed or wounded than those who had served in either the Second World War or the Chinese Civil War. Among the 21,300 Chinese prisoners, 7,110 were repatriated to China in three different groups during September and October after the armistice was signed in July 1953.⁶⁹ Other Chinese prisoners—about 14,200—went to the Republic of China on Taiwan.⁷⁰

Throughout the war, the PRC spent a total of about 10 billion renminbi, equal to US\$3.3 billion at the time. The Chinese Government transported into Korea a total of 5.6 million tons of goods and supplies during the intervention. In the years between 1950 and 1953, China's annual military spending represented 41 per cent, 43 per cent, 33 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively, of its total government budget.⁷¹ The Korean War was the first time Chinese armed forces had engaged in large-scale military operations outside China. Except for the thinly disguised title of 'volunteers', the Chinese military went all out in engaging one of the best-equipped militaries in the world.

66 Zhang, *Red Wings Over the Yalu*, pp. 202–3.

67 Shen Zhihua, 'The Soviet Air Force in the Korean War', in *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu* [Studies on CCP History], no. 2, 2000, pp. 27–9.

68 Xiaobing Li, 'Chinese intervention in the Korean War', in *East Asia and the United States: An Encyclopedia of Relations since 1784*, ed. J.I. Matray, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2002, pp. 94–6.

69 Foreign Affairs to Chinese chargé d'affaires in Pyongyang (Gan Yetao), '[Zhou Enlai's] Speech (draft) at the Third Anniversary of the Korean War, 24 June 1953', File no.106-00034-01 (1), pp. 24–5, Foreign Ministry Archives.

70 Xu, *The First Encounter*, pp. 308–10.

71 CAMS, *War Experience of the CPVF*, pp. 233–4.

By 27 July 1953, when the Korean Armistice Agreement was concluded, China had sent nearly 3 million men to Korea (out of 6.1 million PLA troops). Mao judged China's intervention a victory, as it saved North Korea's communist regime, prevented what had been perceived as a US invasion of China, gained more Russian military and economic aid for China, and established the PRC's new world status.⁷² As Peng stated, the Korean War began a transformation of the Chinese military into a modern force.⁷³ Not only did its performance demonstrate that China was a military force capable of fighting the world's powerful forces to a draw, it also proved that Chinese society was secure enough to withstand a terrible conflict.

China's early Cold War experience—as exemplified by China's participation in the Korean War—not only contributed significantly to shaping the specific course of the Cold War in Asia but also, more importantly, helped to create conditions for the Cold War to remain cold. The lessons learned between 1950 and 1953 influenced subsequent developments, including China's decision to make its own atomic bombs. The war in Korea is by no means forgotten by the Chinese. In China, historians and scholars reopened their objective research and academic debate over the Spring Offensive in the late 1990s, departing from the official conclusion that the campaign was another Chinese victory. For political reasons, however, Chinese historians still have a long way to go before they can publish an objective account of the Chinese Spring Offensive campaign in their home country.

72 Mao, 'The great victory of the war to resist America and aid Korea and our task', in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 5, pp. 101–6.

73 Peng, 'China's military experience in the past four years and the fundamental issues for our future military development', in *Selected Military Papers of Peng Dehuai*, pp. 468–9.

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