

The Origins of the Korean War: Civil War or Stalin's Rollback?

Youngho Kim (Sungshin Women's University)

The study of the origins of the Korean War enters a new phase with the opening of the Soviet archives.¹ We might expect that the release of new documents would clarify controversies about the war, but, as recent debate among scholars makes clear, that has not been the case.² In her debate with Adam B. Ulam on the role of Stalin, Kathryn Weathersby claims that Stalin was the facilitator in helping Kim Il Sung to accomplish not Stalin's, but Kim Il Sung's goals.³ Yet she soon contradicts herself by identifying Stalin's goal of thwarting a rapprochement between the US and the People's Republic of China (PRC).⁴ She comes, in effect, close to Adam Ulam who has been advancing Stalin's "wedge strategy."⁵ In the debate with Weathersby, Bruce Cumings, the prominent civil war theorist, is undaunted and seeks to reinterpret new Soviet documents within the confines of his theory. Declassified Soviet documents show that border conflicts along the thirty-eighth parallel had direct influence on Stalin's Korea decision. Clearly, the same Soviet document can be interpreted differently according to the theoretical perspectives of each scholar.

This essay has two objectives. The first objective is to critically analyze civil war theories, which find the locus of the war on the Korean peninsula, by using newly available Soviet sources. Analysis will focus on Cumings's civil war theory, the most systematic of the genre. There are, of course, eclectic civil war theories which seek to incorporate external factors. William Stueck argues, for example, that "What had begun as a conflict between Koreans aimed at eradicating the division of their country soon became a struggle of broad international proportions."⁶ Still, Stueck's theory can be subsumed in civil war theories since he explains the origins of the war in terms of domestic factors.

Bruce Cumings explains the origins of the war in terms of the extension of border clashes along the thirty-eighth parallel. For Cumings, a series of border conflicts constitute a permissive or underlying cause in whose presence the war *must* occur "in a tract of time," to use Hobbes's famous metaphor, wherein "there is no assurance to the contrary."⁷ Cumings cites the belligerent policies of Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung as evidence to support his theory.

The problem arises when Cumings goes further to prove his theory by referring to counterfactual cases to explain the efficient or immediate cause of the war. The use of counterfactuals for testing theories or hypotheses is often unavoidable in nonexperimental studies like history and international politics.⁸ It is more so because Cumings lacked definitive information before the declassification of the Soviet as well as the North Korean archives. Thus what is important is to check whether the deductive logic of his theory is consistent. The logical consistency is maintained when he advances the controversial "second mosaic" thesis which finds the causal factors in the provocation of the South and the counterattack by the North in the night of June 24-25, 1950. Despite the consistency of the deductive logic of Cumings's civil war theory, the real test for his theory is to what extent it can be substantiated against newly available Soviet documents.

New Soviet documents show that the border conflicts on the Ongjin peninsula constituted the focal

point around which the strategic calculations of Stalin and Kim revolved. This new evidence demonstrates that Cumings's civil war theory is successful in identifying the permissive cause of the war. Yet this essay argues that the efficient cause is found in Stalin's global strategy since Stalin put tight reins on the major border conflicts which might escalate into a general war between the North and South. When Stalin gave Kim the green light for the attack on South Korea, Stalin did not inform Mao about the fact during the Sino-Soviet Treaty meetings in Moscow.⁹ Thus I find the efficient cause of the Korean War in *Stalin's rollback strategy*. This essay argues that the essence of Stalin's rollback in Korea was to cross the US containment line and displace the territories under the US sphere of influence for the first time since the inception of the Cold War by using North Korean troops.

The second objective of this essay is to explain what effects Stalin anticipated with the success in his rollback in Korea. The second objective derives from the fact that the origins of the Korean War and Stalin's objectives are interconnected. There is no doubt that Kim's objective was to achieve reunification through force. Yet Kim did not have the means to achieve his goal without Stalin's assistance. Thus Kim's role as the efficient or immediate agent of causality with his irredentistic zeal is unsubstantiated despite the fact that his belligerent policies, including his Ongjin occupation plan and provocation of a series of border conflicts, provided a permissive environment for Stalin's rollback in Korea. Stalin was the only one with enough power and prestige to either give Kim the go-ahead or to make him wait. When Kim visited Moscow to finalize the invasion plan with Stalin in April 1950, Mao was not consulted beforehand.¹⁰ New Soviet evidence shows that despite Kim's repeated requests Stalin did not allow Kim to invade the South - by providing him the necessary hardware - until there emerged an advantageous strategic environment in the Far East. Thus it is our task to explain the specific contents of Stalin's global strategy and to examine what effects Stalin expected to achieve as a result of the success of the rollback in Korea.²

I begin by discussing Cumings's "second mosaic" thesis and the peculiar geographical position of the Ongjin peninsula. Then, I develop a testable hypothesis through a detailed analysis of US intelligence reports on the border clashes along the thirty-eighth parallel, and of recently declassified Soviet documents. I call this hypothesis *the second mosaic in reverse*: the North provokes the South in an attempt to occupy the Ongjin peninsula, the South counterattacks, and the war spread from Ongjin eastward to Chorwon, Kumhwa, and Yangyang in the east. The hypothesis reverses the second mosaic thesis: the North, not the South, is the provocateur.

Cumings's "second mosaic" and the reversed second mosaic theses represent civil war theories which find the efficient cause of the war in the provocation of either the South or North. The testing of the two hypotheses will show that both of them cannot be substantiated since Stalin would not permit Kim to capture the Ongjin peninsula. The war would begin only when and where Stalin regarded it as contributing to his global Cold War strategy. Thus I find the efficient cause of the war in Stalin's rollback strategy. Stalin's

rollback theory will shed new light on the timing of the North Korean invasion: why June 1950 rather than earlier? Then, I discuss what effects Stalin expected to achieve as a result of the success of the rollback in Korea. I conclude by discussing the possibility of the theoretical synthesis of civil war and Stalin's rollback theories.

Cumings's Second Mosaic and the Ongjin Peninsula

Cumings uses three mosaics to explain the origins of the war.¹¹ The first mosaic is the American/South Korean official view that the Soviet Union and North Korea launched a secretly planned, unprovoked attack. The third mosaic is the North Korean view that the South launched a surprise invasion against the North. Cumings expresses "considerable doubt" about the first mosaic and dismisses the third as North Korean propaganda.¹²

Cumings then presents the second mosaic: "the South provoked the war."¹³ The essence of the second mosaic is that the war was sparked by the South's provocation on the Ongjin peninsula, and quickly spread to the thirty-eighth parallel with the mobilization of Northern troops:

[T]he North was exercising large numbers of troops, and suddenly turned south. This would be consistent either with a closely-held plan for invasion, or a response to a southern provocation: but most likely both.¹⁴

The South's provocation on the Ongjin peninsula becomes, according to Cumings, "a neglected thread in³ unraveling how this [war] was begun."¹⁵ "Some minor lunges across the border" constitute "one very queer detail" to be used to "demolish the official logic or construct an alternative logic."

The region from the Ongjin peninsula to the city of Kaesong constitutes the westernmost sector of the thirty-eighth parallel when the parallel was divided into four sectors.¹⁶ The parallel passed through many strategically important military heights on the Ongjin peninsula such as the Eunpa and Turak Mountain. Two important border cities, Ongjin and Haeju, were located in the South and North of the parallel, respectively.¹⁷ There were no inland roads to the peninsula from the South, thus Ongjin was cut off from the rest of South Korea. South Korean military troops and supplies had to be brought there by sea from the port of Inchon near Seoul.

Dean Rusk, then a colonel on the US War Department General Staff, ignored the anomalous position of the Ongjin peninsula when he recommended the thirty-eighth parallel as the dividing line to receive the surrender of Japanese forces with the Soviet Union.¹⁸ The reason was that he considered it important to include the capital of Korea, Seoul, in the area of American occupation. Despite the inclusion of Seoul and Inchon in the area of American responsibility, the anomalies of the Ongjin peninsula posed serious logistical problems to the US occupation forces.

In an attempt to solve the problem arising from the anomalous position of the Ongjin peninsula, the

American delegation proposed to put the issue of the “partial and local changes of boundaries along the thirty-eighth parallel” on the agenda of the Joint US-Soviet Conference held in accordance with the Communiqué of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers to coordinate administrative-economic matters between the two occupation commands.¹⁹ Colonel General T. F. Shtykov, the chief of the Soviet delegation and, later, Soviet Ambassador to North Korea, refused to put the issue on the joint agenda after the consultation with Moscow.²⁰

In Cumings's view, the Ongjin peninsula is the “civil genesis” of the Korean War. Specifically, he finds the efficient cause in the provocation by the South on the peninsula which ignited the war with the chain reaction by the North. Probably the aim of the provocation was to seize the city of Haeju of North Korea in the night of June 24-25, 1950.²¹

In the face of the provocation by the South, North Korea suddenly mobilized large, if not full, forces. Thus Cumings concludes that:

[T]he war began in the same, remote locus of much of the 1949 fighting, the Ongjin peninsula, and some hours later spread along the parallel westward, to Kaesong, Chunchon, and the East Coast.²²

In view of the sudden mobilization of North Korean forces, Cumings does not exclude the possibility that the aim of the North was “to grab and hold Seoul, and form a coalition government.”²³ Yet in the face of unexpected and rapid collapse of South Korean forces, the North Korean forces “just kept on rolling.”²⁴ 4

The claim that the South attacked Haeju early in the morning of 25 June was dismissed by the South Korean official history of the war as “a completely exaggerated false report contrary to the facts.”²⁵ Moreover, new Soviet documents show that Stalin dispatched Lieutenant General Vasiliev, a hero of the German-Soviet conflict in World War II, to prepare the invasion plan before the secret Stalin-Kim meeting was held in Moscow in April 1950.²⁶ Vasiliev completed the plan with General Kang Kon, the Chief of Staff of North Korea on May 29, 1950.²⁷ Following this plan, on June 12, 1950, North Korean troops began to move and completed their concentration to the advance positions near the thirty-eighth parallel on June 23, 1950.²⁸

On June 24, 1950, North Korean divisional commanders were given orders about the exact time and date of the invasion, 4:40 a.m. of June 25, 1950.²⁹ The North Korean Defense Minister explained the invasion to North Korean soldiers in terms of “counter-attack” operations which resulted from the provocation of the South along the parallel. The emphasis on the civil nature of the war arising from the provocation of the South also became the official view of the Soviet government.³⁰ After the capture of Seoul by the North, Stalin sent an order to “push on” to capture the whole of the South.³¹ Thus Cumings's argument that the efficient cause of the war can be found in the South's provocation on the Ongjin peninsula clashes with the historical evidence.

The Second Mosaic in Reverse

Despite its failure to explain the efficient cause of the war, Cumings's civil war theory is useful in developing a testable hypothesis, that is, the reversed second mosaic. We have seen that the South was at a strategic disadvantage on the Ongjin peninsula. It required twelve hours to reinforce Southern troops and bring supplies by sea from the port of Inchon, whereas the Northern resupply was just one hour away by road. This strategic advantage for the North was not overlooked by Kim Il Sung. Recently declassified Soviet documents show that Kim advocated the capture of the Ongjin peninsula just after the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea in late June 1949.³²

Kim's plan was succinctly summarized in the report of Grigorii I. Tunkin, chargé d'affaires of the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang:

The [Ongjin attack] proposal of Kim Il Sung amounts to the following: at the beginning to strike the South Korean army on the Ongjin peninsula, to destroy the two regiments located there, to occupy the territory of the peninsula and the territory to the east of it, for example to Kaidzio [Kaesong], and then to see what to do further. After this blow the South Korean army may become demoralized. In this case move further to the south. If the South Korean army is not demoralized as a result of the Ongjin operation, to seal the borders seized, to shorten in that way the line of defense approximately by one third [120km].³³

Ambassador Shtykov did not have authority to approve Kim's Ongjin plan. Thus Shtykov promised to relay Kim's plan to Stalin. 5

Just before Kim presented the Ongjin occupation plan to Shtykov, the North launched a major attack on three points on the Ongjin peninsula - Turak Mountain, Undong, and Kuksa Height - at 5 a. m. on August 4, 1949.³⁴ The attack was probably launched to demonstrate the military feasibility of North Korean troops occupying the region. Kim's intention was demonstrated by the use of the 3rd Border Constabulary Brigade commanded by Major General Choi Hyon who was Kim's confidant.³⁵ The North had mobilized less than one or two battalions in most of the border clashes in the past. The August 4 attack, however, involved approximately two regiments supported by artillery units.³⁶ The main assault among three attack points came directly north of the parallel, at Kuksa Height, with one regiment reinforced by one battalion and supported by 120mm mortars and 122mm howitzers.

The objective of the main assault was to take the city of Ongjin. North Korean troops reached the outskirts of Ongjin before the Korean Army (KA) repulsed them. Early in the battle, two companies of the KA were almost completely wiped out.³⁷ Estimated KA losses totaled 53 dead and 121 wounded.³⁸ It was reported that North Korean casualties involved 266 killed, 295 wounded, and one captured.³⁹

The Korean Army reinforcement departed Inchon by landing ship tank (LST) at 3 a.m. on August 5. Yet the tide prohibited immediate debarkation of KA troops, further evidence of the strategic disadvantage for the South on the Ongjin peninsula.⁴⁰ The eventual arrival of the reinforcements brought the strength of the KA

to roughly two infantry regiments and one battery of 105mm howitzers. After the KA succeeded in dislodging North Koreans from two strategic salients, the region was relatively quiet and serious fighting did not flare up until the middle of October 1949.⁴¹

The behavior of South Korean political and military leaders also suggests that the reversed second mosaic was a highly probable scenario since South Korean leaders considered the defense of the Ongjin peninsula vital to the security of the ROK. Despite opposition from the US military advisors in Korea, the South Korean government reinforced the region with a large number of troops whenever the North provoked the South in the area.⁴²

When a battalion of North Korean forces attacked Ongjin on May 28, 1949, President Rhee decided to reinforce South Korean forces in the area with a regiment.⁴³ The decision to send such a large number of forces was made “without the prior knowledge and contrary to the long-standing advice of the Senior American Military Advisor.”⁴⁴ President Rhee considered the Ongjin peninsula indispensable to the territorial integrity of the ROK, and in a statement released to foreign correspondents expressed his determination to defend Ongjin:

We will do the same whenever the misguided people of the North...encroach on that part of Korea [Ongjin] which is governed by Koreans. We will do this with or without further aid from the other democratic peoples of the world.⁴⁵

President Rhee’s determination was shared by the leaders of the Korean Army (KA). On August 5,⁶ 1949, a day after a massive North Korean attack on Ongjin, Brigade General William L. Roberts, the Chief of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), met with Captain Shin Sung Mo, National Defense Minister of the ROK, and General Chae Pyong Duk, Chief of Staff, to review the Ongjin situation.⁴⁶ Shin conveyed the view of the general staff of the KA to Roberts:

The [South Korean] military were insistent that the only way to relieve pressure on Ongjin would be to drive north. The military urged mounting an immediate attack north towards Charwon[sic - Chorwon].⁴⁷

Thus the South Korean military leaders were determined to take every measure to defend the Ongjin peninsula, including launching a direct attack on the North, since the city of Chorwon was located at 20 miles north of the thirty-eighth parallel.

For both political and military reasons, the North Korean attack on the Ongjin peninsula would have deep political ramifications for the southern regime. How can a modern nation-state justify itself if it cannot defend its own territorial integrity? Any compromise of territorial integrity of the ROK would also have dealt a devastating blow to the effectiveness of the Rhee government. This may have been exactly what Kim Il Sung hoped for. For military reasons, the Korean Army might have driven north to take Chorwon or other cities

north of the parallel in an attempt to relieve pressure on the Ongjin peninsula.⁴⁸ Thus the Ongjin attack had the possibility of unleashing a general war between the North and South. Hence the second mosaic in reverse: Kim Il Sung seeks to occupy the Ongjin peninsula, the South counterattacks in either Ongjin or other areas north of the parallel, and the border conflict erupts into a general war.

We have developed the hypothesis, called the *second mosaic in reverse*, through a detailed analysis of US intelligence reports on the border incidents, and of Kim's Ongjin occupation plan. Testing the hypothesis will help us to clarify the efficient cause of the war.

Testing of the Reversed Second Mosaic

Let us examine the reversed second mosaic in light of Stalin's response to Kim's Ongjin occupation plan. On August 27, 1949 Shtykov reported to Stalin Kim's plans to invade the South and to occupy the Ongjin peninsula.⁴⁹ In the briefing, Shtykov advanced the view that the North should not be permitted to invade the South, citing the existence of two internationally recognized states on the peninsula.⁵⁰ The possibility that the US would intervene to support the South could not be discounted. Furthermore, he cited the failure of the North to secure predominant military capabilities over the South. Shtykov argued that the Ongjin plan was militarily feasible, but the operations could turn into a prolonged war if the South counterattacked.

In the absence of Ambassador Shtykov, Kim Il Sung ordered his personal secretary and Russian translator Mun Il to see chargé d'affaires Tunkin on September 3, 1949.⁵¹ Mun repeated Kim's Ongjin occupation plan, adding that "Kim Il Sung is convinced that they [North Koreans] are in a position to seize South Korea in the course of two weeks, maximum 2 months" if the international circumstances were favorable after the Ongjin operations. "Favorable international circumstances" probably meant American non-intervention.

Upon the receipt of Tunkin's report of September 3, Andrei Gromyko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, instructed Tunkin to meet Kim and clarify questions related to Kim's Ongjin occupation plan.⁵² The next day Tunkin met Kim and reported the results of the meeting and his own recommendations to Moscow.⁵³ Tunkin reported that Kim's Ongjin plan would result in a civil war between the North and South since most of the leaders of the two Koreas supported reunification through force. Tunkin's analysis anticipated the development of the scenario of the reversed second mosaic: Provoked by the North's move on Ongjin, the South would attack Chorwon or other areas in the North. Yet Tunkin recommended that the Soviet Union prevent the reversed second mosaic from happening.

In addition to the possibility of a general war between the North and South, Tunkin also objected to Kim's request to occupy Ongjin because of the impossibility of a speedy victory of the North. The Ongjin attack would lead to a prolonged war if the North failed to secure military predominance over the South.

Moreover, he did not exclude the possibility of direct American intervention to rescue the South when the Ongjin operations developed into a prolonged war. Thus Tunkin concluded that the North must not be permitted to launch the Ongjin attack, much less the general invasion.

In the same report, Tunkin explained why the US might aid the South. In his view, American attitudes in the Far East would be stiffened following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek in China. When the North did invade the South in June 1950, the intelligence estimate of the Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) of the US State Department was concerned about the negative impact resulting from another Communist victory on the heels of Mao's victory in mainland China:

A severe blow would be dealt US prestige throughout Asia and the encouragement which has been felt in widely scattered areas in consequence of the promise of more active American support of anti-Communist forces would be reversed. Equally important, the feeling would grow among South East Asian peoples that the USSR is advancing invincibly, and there would be a greatly increased impulse to "get on the bandwagon."⁵⁴

The OIR report recommended the "effective intervention" in the Korean War.⁵⁵ Tunkin's anticipation of direct American intervention in the war proved right.

After Stalin reviewed the recommendations of Ambassador Shtykov and Counselor Tunkin, the final decision on Kim's invasion and Ongjin occupation plans was made and sent to the North in the form of the decision of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on September 24, 1949.⁵⁶ The Politbureau decision stated that because the North was not militarily prepared for an invasion, the result might also be a prolonged, indecisive war. While the decision rejected an invasion, it did encourage strong guerrilla activities in the South which might weaken the Rhee regime.⁵⁷

On the Ongjin occupation plan, the Politbureau decision stated:

As regards a partial operation to seize Ongjin peninsula and the region of Kaesong, as a result of which the borders of North Korea would be moved almost to Seoul itself, it is impossible to view this operation other than as the beginning of a war between North and South Korea, for which North Korea is not prepared either militarily or politically.⁵⁸

We have seen that South Korean political and military leaders would not permit the North to occupy the Ongjin peninsula. The Korean Army would drive north to take Chorwon or other cities north of the parallel in an attempt to relieve pressure on the Ongjin peninsula. The Soviet Politbureau's analysis of the Korean situation reflected concerns about the development of situations where the reversed second mosaic might take place. On these grounds, the Politbureau rejected Kim's occupation plan since the North was not prepared for a general war with the South.

In addition to the Politbureau decision, there is further evidence that Stalin put tight reins on Kim until the emergence of a more auspicious strategic environment for the Soviet Union in the Far East. Stalin's

dominant role in the Korean decision can be seen in his handling of a major border incident which took place contrary to the order of the Politbureau decision of September 24, 1949.

The North launched a massive attack on strategic Unpa Mountain on the Ongjin peninsula on October 14, 1949.⁵⁹ Soviet advisors were directly involved in Ongjin operations.⁶⁰ After this border incident, a proposal was made to the Politbureau to investigate whether Ambassador Shtykov had faithfully carried out its decision of September 24, 1949, which prohibited Kim from provoking a major border incident.⁶¹ Gromyko repeated this warning to Shtykov in a telegram dated October 27, 1949:

It was forbidden to you to recommend to the government of North Korea that they carry out active operations against the South Koreans without approval of the Center, and it was indicated to you that it was necessary that you present to the Center timely reports on all actions which are being planned and events which are occurring along the 38th parallel.⁶²

After the order was delivered to Shtykov and Kim, no major border fighting along the thirty-eighth parallel occurred until the outbreak of the war in June 1950.

This drop in major border incidents was noted in intelligence reports of the Far East Command which Cumings calls “unimpeachable American archival documentation.”⁶³ From October 21, 1949, to February 14, 1950, the US intelligence reports recorded that “all incidents were of a minor nature.”⁶⁴ Stalin’s response to the October Ongjin incident and the decrease in Northern provocation demonstrate that Stalin sought to curtail border conflicts that might flare up into a general war between the North and South before a more⁹ opportune moment.

The analysis of Kim’s Ongjin occupation plan and Stalin’s response to the plan and the October border incident demonstrates that Stalin gauged the North Korean invasion in light of his global Cold War strategy.⁶⁵ Kim Il Sung recognized Stalin’s dominant role in his conversation with Ambassador Shtykov: “he [Kim] himself cannot begin an attack, because he is a communist, a disciplined person and for him the order of Comrade Stalin is law.”⁶⁶ Thus the transfer of the decision from Stalin to Kim never happened.⁶⁷

Moreover, the hypothesis of the reversed second mosaic cannot be substantiated since Stalin would not permit Kim to capture the Ongjin peninsula which might embroil the Soviet Union in a war on the Korean peninsula which might develop into a general war with American intervention. The war would begin only when and where Stalin regarded it as contributing to the pursuit of his global Cold War strategy. Thus the efficient cause of the Korea War can be adequately understood only when we take into account Stalin’s global strategy.

The testing of Cumings’s “second mosaic” thesis and the reversed second mosaic demonstrates that civil war theories fail to explain the efficient cause of the war. Nonetheless, the tit-for-tat strategy of the North and South for Ongjin border clashes, Kim’s Ongjin occupation plan, and Stalin’s response to it show that Cumings’s civil war theory is successful in locating the permissive cause of the war with the use of the US

archives before the opening of the Soviet archives. Yet the identification of the permissive cause does not provide sufficient explanation for the locus of the war. Thus it is our task to explain the specific contents of Stalin's global strategy and to examine what effects Stalin anticipated with the success of his strategy in Korea.

An Alternative Hypothesis: Stalin's Rollback

In contrast to Cumings's "second mosaic" and the reversed second mosaic theses, Stalin's rollback hypothesis seeks to explain the efficient cause of the war in terms of Stalin's global strategy in the Cold War. The essence of Stalin's rollback in Korea was to cross the US containment line and displace the territories under the US sphere of influence for the first time since the beginning of the Cold War by using North Korean troops. Stalin's rollback hypothesis would be better understood if we set it against American rollback after MacArthur's victory at Inchon. The US under the flag of the UN crossed the containment line set at the thirty-eighth parallel to remove North Korea from the Soviet sphere of influence. The two superpowers exchanged rollback on the Korean peninsula, and would never do it again during the Cold War period.

The success of Stalin's rollback in Korea would make the Soviet Union look like marching invincibly in the Far East. The fall of Korea into the Soviet sphere of influence would have the negative psychological impact on Japan.⁶⁸ Stalin explained one of his rollback objectives in terms of the disruption of the consolidation of Japan as a US ally in Asia.⁶⁹ The creation of the unbroken arc of *cordon sovietaire* encircling Japan from Soviet power positions in Sakhalin in the northeast and in the Korean peninsula in the southwest¹⁰ would exert significant psychological pressure on Japan to stay neutral in the Cold War.⁷⁰ George F. Kennan, the architect of the US containment policy, regarded Japan as one of the five regions of the world "where the sinews of modern military strength could be produced in quantity" with "industrially trained and highly educated manpower."⁷¹ Japan's shift to the neutrality would disrupt US plans to resuscitate Japan as a reliable ally.

The subtlety of Stalin's rollback strategy was aptly captured by John Foster Dulles, then Consultant to the Secretary of State on the Japanese Peace Treaty:

The[North Korean] attack does have the effect of giving renewed importance in Japan to military factors and making difficult a transition to political, economic, and social autonomy.⁷²

The disruption of the transfer of the occupation power to the Japanese authority would aggravate US-Japanese relations. The continued occupation of Japan might incur a violent hostility and arouse popular resistance like the US had witnessed in South Korea. The undercurrent of doubt about US intentions with a prolonged occupation would reduce Japan's utility and reliability as an ally.⁷³ Thus Japan would become a point of weakness rather than of strength in the Far East. These effects are what Stalin expected from his

rollback in Korea.

In addition to Stalin's concern about the emergence of Japan as a US ally in the Far East, the absorption of South Korea by the North would have a great symbolic value for the Soviet Union. The loss of Korea would be dealt a severe blow to the prestige of the US which played the dominant role in the creation of South Korea. Prestige as "the reputation for power" constitutes an important psychological aspect of power in international politics.⁷⁴

The term "prestige" derives from the Latin, meaning "juggler's tricks" and "to dazzle the eyes." Let me take an example from the Korean War to show what this means in international politics. General MacArthur's brilliant success of the Inchon landing resulted in the development of what General Ridgway called "an almost superstitious regard for General MacArthur's infallibility."⁷⁵ As the original meaning of the term "prestige" shows, MacArthur's *dazzling* performance at Inchon heightened his own prestige. MacArthur's reputation was so elevated that he appeared infallible. Acheson noted that even President Truman made a "pilgrimage" to Wake island to show his respect for the general.⁷⁶ Likewise, Stalin also expected that the *dazzling* victory on Korea would make the Soviet Union look like advancing invincibly in the Far East. Thus the enhancement of Soviet prestige was one of the most important effects which Stalin sought to achieve through his rollback in Korea.

Do we have any evidence from the Soviet archives to support the emphasis of Stalin's rollback theory on his concern about prestige?⁷⁷ Stalin's telegram to Mao provides an important clue to this question. Stalin emphasizes the importance of prestige in the analysis of the reasons for American intervention:

11

[T]he USA, despite its unreadiness for a big war, could still be drawn into a big war out of [consideration of] prestige, which, in turn, would drag China into the war, and along with this draw into the war the USSR, which is bound with China by the Mutual Assistance Pact.⁷⁸

Stalin's analysis of American intentions represented the mirror image of his concern about prestige in his rollback in Korea. Thus, for Secretary of State Dean Acheson, American intervention aimed to defeat Stalin's rollback because "to back away from this challenge, in view of our [American] capacity of meeting it, would be highly destructive of the power and prestige of the United States."⁷⁹ Yet for Acheson, the defeat of Stalin's rollback must be achieved without provoking Stalin into a general war.⁸⁰

In pursuing his rollback strategy in Korea, Stalin also expected to drive a wedge between the US and the PRC by creating untenable political and military environments in the Far East.⁸¹ The net result would be to make Mao dependent on the Soviet Union, thus preventing the emergence of a Tito in Asia. For Stalin, this state of affairs occurred when the US Seventh Fleet occupied the Taiwan straight. Thus the Korean War resulted in the delay of normalization of relations between the US and the PRC for twenty years, and ushered in what is called the "golden age" in Sino-Soviet relations until 1958.⁸²

Stalin's pursuit of the wedge strategy contributes to explaining the timing of the North Korean invasion: Why June 1950 rather than earlier?⁸³ The establishment of the PRC contributed to the emergence of a "transnational network" embracing North Korea, Manchuria, and the Soviet Far East.⁸⁴ Stalin sought to consolidate the North Korean-Manchurian-Soviet Far Eastern region into the "strategic complex."⁸⁵ The consolidation of this strategic complex was made possible through a secret protocol to the main Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty. The existence of the additional treaty was widely rumored, but not confirmed until 1989.⁸⁶

The secret protocol stipulated that the citizens of third countries such as those of the US and Britain were not allowed "settle or carry out any industrial, financial, trade, or other related activities in Manchuria and Xinjiang, and the Soviet Union would impose comparable restrictions on the Soviet Far East and the Central Asian republics."⁸⁷ The agreement cleared Manchuria of any outside interference. Stalin's attempt to consolidate the strategic complex before the Korean War demonstrates his careful attention to cultivating an advantageous strategic environment.

The strategic complex would appear as a formidable threat when MacArthur demanded the expansion of hostilities into Manchuria after the defeat of the UN offensive of November 24, 1950. O. Edmund Clubb, a Chinese specialist of the US State Department, called the strategic complex "a trap vaster in scope than anything dreamed of by Machiavellian strategists of former eras."⁸⁸ Thus the expansion of the war in Stalin's strategic complex meant "slowly sinking in the quagmire of that vast waste over which no victory could be anything but pyrrhic." If the US expands the war into Manchuria, Stalin would stigmatize the US as an aggressor and invoke the mutual defense clause of the Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty.⁸⁹ If the US entered what Clubb called "a vast wasteland" and bogged down as the Japanese imperialist did, the US would have faced a disaster twenty years before that in Vietnam. Stalin's decision to approve Kim's plan was not "reckless war-making of the worst kind," but was a carefully planned rollback policy.⁹⁰

In addition to the signing of the secret protocol, Dean Acheson's National Press Club speech had great influence on Stalin who carefully studied it.⁹¹ Acheson stated that the US defensive perimeter in the Far East ran from the Aleutians, through Japan and the Ryukyus(Okinawa), to the Philippines, excluding South Korea.⁹² Before Acheson's speech, Soviet diplomats began boycotting UN functions on January 8, 1950 to protest the refusal of the UN for the admission of the PRC. Jacob Malik, the Soviet representative to the UN, withdrew from the UN on January 13. Despite Acheson's complaint that his speech was muffled by Malik's walk-out, it is no doubt that the speech had great impact on Stalin's decision to permit Kim's invasion of the South.⁹³ Malik did not attend the Security Council meeting of June 25, 1950 with the direct order from Stalin, thus opening the way for UN intervention against the North Korean attack.⁹⁴ Recently declassified Mao's conversation with former Soviet Ambassador Pavel Yudin shows that Stalin seriously miscalculated regarding the possibility of the formation of UN forces to aid the South.⁹⁵

As soon as the details of Sino-Soviet alliance treaties, including the secret protocol, were finalized at

the end of January 1950, Stalin expressed his desire to approve the North Korean invasion. On January 30, 1950 he cabled Ambassador Shtykov:

He [Kim Il Sung] must understand that such a large matter in regard to South Korea such as he wants to undertake needs large preparation. The matter must be organized so that there would not be too great a risk. If he wants to discuss this matter with me, then I will always be ready to receive him and discuss with him. Transmit all this to Kim Il Sung and tell that I am ready to help him in this matter.⁹⁶

In April 1950 the Stalin-Kim meeting was held in Moscow to discuss the invasion plan in April 1950. In the meeting, Stalin approved the invasion with one condition: "the question [of the North Korean invasion] must be decided finally by the Chinese and Korean comrades together, and in case of a disagreement by the Chinese comrades, the resolution of the question must be put off until there is a new discussion."⁹⁷

After the Moscow meeting with Stalin, Kim went to Beijing to meet Mao on May 13, 1950.⁹⁸ Kim conveyed Stalin's condition to Mao, yet Mao wanted confirmation of the Stalin-Kim agreements directly from Stalin. Thus on May 14, 1950, N. V. Roshchin, Soviet Ambassador to China, delivered Stalin's message in which Stalin repeated what he had given the exactly same condition to Kim. After reviewing Stalin's telegram, Mao agreed to the North Korean invasion. Thus Stalin's Korea decision resulted from his deliberate maneuver to coordinate three Communist countries for his rollback strategy.

With the consolidation of the strategic complex in the Far East and the expansion and equipment of the KPA with Soviet weapons, the date for the invasion was set on June 25, 1950. Stalin's rollback began as North Korean troops, deployed within 10-15 Km north of the parallel from June 12, 1950, crossed the parallel.⁹⁹ As Clausewitz says, every war takes place in a realm of twilight, yet Kim Il Sung asserted - wrongly - that victory would be swift.¹⁰⁰

Kim might also have been certain that the Soviets would aid the North if the war turned sour. Yet Stalin sought to avoid direct confrontation with the US in Korea which might lead to a general war. Every measure was taken to conceal Soviet involvement in the planning and execution of the war. The revelation of Soviet involvement could be used as the pretext for the US to hold the Soviet Union directly responsible for the war, thus greatly increasing the possibility of direct US-Soviet conflict on the Korean peninsula.¹⁰¹ Moreover, whenever Kim sought to embroil the Soviets in the war, Stalin rejected Kim's requests, wanting to limit his rollback.

For example, three days before the beginning of the war, Stalin ordered the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang that no coded telegrams should be exchanged between the Embassy and the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁰² Stalin's prohibition of the exchange of coded telegrams reflected his concern about the revelation of direct Soviet involvement in the planning and execution of the war. Three days into the war with North Korean troops occupying Seoul, Kim asked Stalin to permit the group of Soviet advisors, including

General Vasiliev, to join the KPA Advanced Field Headquarters in Seoul on July 4, 1950.¹⁰³ Because the stationing of Soviet advisors might have been construed as Stalin's determination to directly confront the US on the peninsula, Kim's request was rejected, and Vasiliev was ordered to stay in Pyongyang.¹⁰⁴ And when North Korean troops were routed and Kim asked direct Soviet assistance, Stalin refused to send Soviet troops and, instead, prodded Mao to dispatch Chinese troops.¹⁰⁵ These examples show that Stalin's rollback was geographically limited to the Korean peninsula.

The geographically limited nature of Stalin's rollback was dictated by the political objectives Stalin sought to achieve in his Korea decision. The objectives were to disrupt a unilateral peace treaty of the US with Japan and to deal a severe blow to the prestige of the US. The erosion of American prestige in the Far East would generate doubt about American commitments among allies in Europe. For Stalin, these objectives could be achieved without provoking the US into a general war.

Conclusions

In contrast to Cumings's "second mosaic" and the reversed second mosaic theses, Stalin's rollback theory facilitates our understanding of Stalin's policies by setting the range of expectations. Two brief examples demonstrate the explanatory power of Stalin's rollback theory.

First, we can expect that Stalin was determined to score a victory on the Korean peninsula when he decided to approve and support the North Korean invasion. The amount of Soviet aid to the North bears out this expectation. Stalin approved the North Korean purchase of Soviet weapons and equipments in the amount of \$50 millions.¹⁰⁶ This is the same amount of Soviet loans to the PRC in 1950 and implies the enormity of Stalin's support for the much smaller North Korea.¹⁰⁷

Before the declassification of Soviet documents, Cumings wondered why the Soviet Union had not supplied advanced weaponry such as the new Stalin tank. Cumings did not exclude the possibility that the North could have acted independently in invading the South since the North was "by no means reliant solely on Soviet arms."¹⁰⁸ Yet the new Stalin tank with a listed weight of approximately 51 tons was far too heavy for bridges in Korea.¹⁰⁹ General Roberts, the Commander of the KMAG, raised the same doubt when the South requested a type of US tanks weighing forty-six tons:

Limits on Korean railroads due to bridge capacity is thirty tons. I think they [the South Koreans] have failed to reckon with the problem of distribution of such tanks once they were received in Korea.¹¹⁰

Thus the Soviet Union helped the North to organize a tank brigade with T-34 medium tanks equipped with new high-velocity 85mm guns.¹¹¹ The medium tank weighed 29 tons. The equipment of the North Korean Army with efficient Soviet weaponry can be construed as the expression of Stalin's determination to score a

victory on the Korean peninsula.

Second, scholars are debating whether Stalin reneged on his promise to provide air cover for China when China intervened in the war. Stalin's rollback theory anticipates that Stalin was willing to provide air cover as long as it does not develop into a general war between the US and the Soviet Union. The Chinese specialists claim that Stalin reneged on air cover when Stalin-Mao talks took place in Moscow in early October 1950, thus forcing Mao to reconsider his decision to send troops in Korea.¹¹² Yet new Soviet documents show that Stalin was consistent in his promise for air cover since July 5, 1950 when he decided to provide air cover at the request of the PRC.¹¹³ This fact fits the rollback theory.

The distinction between the permissive and efficient causes of the war provides us with the possibility of synthesizing the study of the origins of the Korean War. The contributions of Cumings's civil war theory lie in the clarification of the permissive cause of the war which is found in a series of border clashes along the parallel. New Soviet documents demonstrate that major border conflicts had direct impact on Stalin's strategic calculations.

Nonetheless, the clarification of the permissive cause of the war is not sufficient for the explanation of the origins of the war although major border clashes always had the potential to escalate into a general war between the North and South without any outside great power to restrain it. Yet the two Koreas did not exist in a vacuum. The US and Soviet Union put tight reins on Rhee and Kim, respectively.¹¹⁴ The Korean War broke out only when Stalin approved and supported the North Korean invasion by capitalizing Kim's irredentistic zeal to reunify the nation by the use of force. When Stalin decided to approve the invasion on January 30, 1950, he did not inform Mao about the fact while they held the Sino-Soviet treaty meetings in Moscow. Thus Stalin's global strategy constitutes the efficient cause of the war which can be explained in terms of Stalin's rollback strategy in Korea. The two poles of civil war and Stalin's rollback theories will help us to have a clear perspective on the origins of the Korean War. 15

In the face of Stalin's rollback in Korea, the US, under UN auspices, responded with its huge war-making capabilities. After MacArthur's dazzling victory at Inchon, the US pursued its *counter-rollback* by crossing the thirty-eighth parallel and marching to the Yalu River. Rosemary Foot rightly captures the consequences of the Korean War which resulted from the exchange of rollback by the two superpowers on the Korean peninsula:

Koreans, both North and South, also suffered enormous hardships as the conflict engulfed their country...To the major powers it may have been a limited war, but to the inhabitants of the country, it must have seemed total.¹¹⁵

Stalin, who had killed millions of innocent Soviet citizens, was unlikely to care much about the calamities visited on the Korean nation if the war served his broader political objectives. What Kim Il Sung

perhaps did not foresee was the disastrous consequences of his reunification policy by the use of force. From the standpoint of a consequentialist ethic of responsibility, we cannot overlook Kim's naiveté about Stalin's strategic calculations and his responsibility for a disaster unprecedented in the history of Korea.¹¹⁶ No doubt, the reunification of the Korean nation is an important goal for any responsible leader, yet normative evaluations of reunification policies will differ over the means employed.

As a result of the two devastating world wars on the European continent, Europe ceased to be a center of world politics and relegated the stage to the two superpowers. Despite the two world wars, European nations seek another "European miracle" through the European Union. Yet another war on the Korean peninsula would be a threat to the very existence of the Korean nation and the "long peace" in East Asia which contributed to economic prosperity. It must be a sobering lesson which we can draw from the study of the origins of the Korean War.

Endnote

1. Russian President Boris Yeltsin handed over Soviet archival documents on the Korean War to President Kim Young Sam of the Republic of Korea (ROK) during the latter's visit to Moscow in June 1994. The collection of Soviet documents includes 216 previously classified documents, dated 1949 to 1953, totaling 548 pages. The summarized version of the Korean translation of the collection was released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK in July 1994. The Korean translation will be hereafter called the *Soviet Documents*. The *Soviet Documents* will be cited in English from translation of the Korean version with the date of the documents. Most of the Soviet archival documents have been translated into English by Kathryn Weathersby. If the documents are quoted from her translation, they will be specified. For her translation, see Kathryn Weathersby, "The Soviet Role in the Early Phase of the Korean War: New Documentary Evidence," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter 1993), pp. 425-58; also Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung, and the Prelude to War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 5 (Spring 1995), pp. 1-9 (hereafter cited as *CWIHP Bulletin*); also Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7 (Winter 1995-1996), pp. 30-84. For Soviet documents on Chinese intervention, see Alexander Mansourov, Stalin, Mao, Kim and China's Decision to Enter the Korean War, September 16-October 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives," *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7, pp. 94-119. For the review of the literature on the Korean War, see Rosemary Foot, "Making Known the Unknown War: Policy Analysis of the Korean Conflict in the Last Decade," *Diplomatic History*, Vo. 15, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 411-31; also Hakjoo Kim, "Trends in Korean War Studies: A Review of the Literature," in *Korea and the Cold War: Division, Destruction, and Disarmament*, Kim Chull Baum and James I. Matray, eds. (Claremont: Regina Books, 1993), pp. 7-34.¹⁷
2. For the differences in the interpretation of the Soviet documents on the Korean War, see Adam B. Ulam, "Letter to the Editor of the *CWIHP Bulletin*"; Weathersby, "Kathryn Weathersby's Response," in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 4 (Fall 1994), p. 21; also Bruce Cumings, "Letter to the Editor of the *CWIHP Bulletin*" and "Weathersby's Response," in *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 120-2.
3. Weathersby, "Weathersby's Response to Ulam," p. 21; also Weathersby, "The Soviet Role in the Early Phase of the Korean War," p. 439.
4. Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea," p. 32.
5. Adam Ulam, *The Communists: the Story of Power and Lost Revolution, 1948-1991* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), p. 79.
6. William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 13. For the similar view, see Okonoki Masao, "The Domestic Roots of the Korean War," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1977), p. 299.

Theories which explain the origins of the war in terms of factional struggles among North Korean leaders can also be classified as civil war theories. For this view, see Robert R. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1975), pp. 105-10.

⁷. For the distinction between the permissive or underlying and efficient or immediate causes of war, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 231-4. Waltz develops the concept of the permissive cause of war to explain the recurrence of war in an anarchical realm of international politics. The lack of the international sovereign in the international state of nature constitutes the permissive cause which Waltz defines as the Third image⁷ explanation of war. Yet this permissive cause cannot explain why a particular war takes place at a particular moment. Thus Waltz develops the concept of the efficient cause of a war to explain specific reasons for a war which involves “a number of special circumstances - location, size, power, interest, type of government, past history and tradition.” For Waltz’s further elaboration of the concept of the permissive cause into the parsimonious structural realism, see *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 102-28. For the view of Hobbes, see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, C. B. Macpherson, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pt. I, Ch. 13, p. 186. For the discussion of Hobbes’s contributions to international relations theory, see Hedley Bull, “Hobbes and the International Anarchy,” *Social Research* Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 717-38; also Robert O. Keohane, “Hobbes’s Dilemma and Institutional Change in World Politics: Sovereignty in International Society,” in *Whose World Order? Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War*, Hans-Hensik Holm and Georg Sorensen, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 165-86. 18

⁸. For the discussion of the methods of hypothesis testing based on counterfactual arguments, see James D. Fearon, “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science,” *World Politics*, Vol. 43, pp. 169-95.

⁹. Recently declassified Mao-Yudin conversation shows that when Mao was in Moscow between December 1949 and February 1950, there was no discussion between Stalin and Mao about conquering the South, but rather on strengthening the North. See Dieter Heinzig, “Stalin, Mao, Kim and Korean War Origins, 1950: A Russian Documentary Discrepancy,” *CWHIP Bulletin*, Nos. 8-9, p. 240.

¹⁰. *Ibid.*

11. Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 568-621. Cumings uses the term “Mosaic” to explain “how the war might have started.” He maintains that “at least the honest historian must retain some skepticism here, pending further information.” Nonetheless, he advances the second mosaic thesis as a means of testing counterfactual cases to see if hypothesized causal factors for his civil war theory is present or absent. See *ibid.*, pp. 569, 618.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 618.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 568.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 617.

15. Cumings's preface in I. F. Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War, 1950-1951* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), p. xv. Stone's book, originally published by the Monthly Review Press in 1951, was reprinted with a new preface by Cumings.

16. The central sector extends from Kaesong to Chunchon. The mountainous areas are located between Chunchon and the east coast. The easternmost sector extends from the mountainous areas to the east coast. For the similar division of the parallel into four military sectors by Major General Chae Pyong Duk, the Army Chief of Staff of the Republic of Korea, see "Recent Military Operations along the 38th Parallel," August 18, 1949, 895.00, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives (NA), Washington, D.C.

17. 175,000 people lived on the southern part of the Ongjin peninsula. See Muccio to Acheson, July 1, 1949, 895.00, RG 59.

18. Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk's memo to G. Bernard Noble, Chief of the Division of Historical Policy Research, July 12, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, Vol. VI: the Far East* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 1039 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*).¹⁹

19. For the full text of the Communiqué, see *FRUS*, 1945, VI, pp. 1150-51. The Joint US-Soviet Conference from January 16, 1946 to February 5, 1946 was held as the preliminary meeting to the Joint US-Soviet Commission dealing with the establishment of the Korean Provisional Government.

20. "Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Conference," January 19, 1946 and "Press Release Regarding the US-Soviet Joint Conference," February 6, 1946, Minutes of Joint Commission Meeting, RG 43, N.A., Washington, D.C.

21. Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, p. 598.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 569.

23. *Ibid.*, 617. The view of the limited North Korean aim of capturing Seoul was first advanced by Joyce and Gabriel Kolko. See *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 578.

24. Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, p. 617.

25. Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Korea, *Hanguk Chonjang-sa* (History of the Korean War), Vol. II (Seoul: Ministry of Defense, 1969), 221, quoted in “Comment: Robert R. Simmons,” *China Quarterly*, Vol. 54 (April-June 1973), p. 355, (n. 5).
26. Shtykov to Vasilevsky, February 23, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 37.
27. Telegram of May 29, 1950, *Soviet Documents*.
28. Shtykov to Zakharov, June 26, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 39. Actual North Korean troop dispositions were confirmed by POW interrogation reports by the US intelligence. For example, the advance contingents of the 2d Division of the North, called the “Nanam Division” among North Koreans, began to move to the city of Kumhwa on June 12, 1950 and completed the disposition of the whole division on June 14, 1950. See Nos. 71 and 75, Box 4452, the Numerical Series of Intelligence Documents (ID File), G-2, ACofS, RG 319. I am greatly indebted to Archivist Cary Conn at the Washington National Records Center at Suitland, Maryland in locating these interrogation reports.
29. Shtykov to Zakharov, June 26, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 39.
30. For the view of the Soviet Union on the origins of the Korean War, see Kirk to Acheson, June 29, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 229. In his memoirs, Gromyko is persistent that the war took place “When the puppet government of South Korea was being egged on by the USA to start war on North Korea.” See Gromyko, *Memoirs*, Harold Shukman, trans. (London: Hutchinson, 1989), p. 101.
31. Stalin to Shtykov, July 1, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” 101.
32. August 14, 1949, *Soviet Documents*. Kim presented the Ongjin occupation plan to Ambassador Shtykov before the latter left on vacation for Moscow.
33. Tunkin to Soviet Foreign Ministry, September 14, 1949 in Weathersby, “To Attack, or Not to Attack?” p. 7.
34. For the reports of the Ongjin incident of August 4, 1949, see KMAG G-2 Periodic Report Nos. 159-161, “P” File, RG 319; also KMAG G-3 Operations Report Nos. 6-7, “P” File; also Intelligence Summary Nos. 2522-2566, 2528, and 2531, Far Eastern Command (FEC), RG 338; also Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, pp. 392-94; also John Merrill, *Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), p. 140.

35. The following intelligence information suggests that Choi was one of Kim's closest associates: “[Choi] addresses Kim Il Sung by his given name of Il Sung Ah, which proves that he is a most intimate friend of Kim.” See Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 2, box 5428, KMAG File, RG 338.
36. KMAG G-2 Periodic Report No. 159.
37. KMAG G-2 Periodic Report Nos. 159-60.
38. FEC Intelligence Summary No. 2528.
39. FEC Intelligence Summary No. 2531.
40. KMAG G-2 Periodic Report No. 160.
41. FEC Intelligence Summary No. 2525.
42. Here I do not imply that the North was always solely responsible for the border incidents: “Most incidents on the Parallel have been due mainly to needling by opposing local forces. Both North and South are at fault.” See Roberts to Bolte, August 19, 1949, box 548, P & O 091 Korea, RG 319.
43. FEC Intelligence Summary No. 2465. Two battalions from the 12th Regiment of the Korean Army (KA) left the port of Inchon on May 29, bringing the total of the KA forces on the Ongjin peninsula to 1,150 army troops and 7,500 police. On May 30, artillery and additional reinforcements²¹ were requested, and plans were made to send a battalion of the 13th Regiment on May 31.
44. KMAG G-2 Periodic Report No. 1122.
45. Muccio to Acheson, July 14, 1949, 895.00, RG 59. Even after the signing of the Korean War Armistice, Rhee ordered South Korean military leaders to prepare plans for the retaking of the Ongjin peninsula. See Donald S. MacDonald, *U.S.-Korean Relations from Liberation to Self-Reliance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 23-4, 80, quoted in Cumings’s letter to the editor of the *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7, p. 121, (note 1).
46. KMAG G-3 Operations Report No. 6. US occupation forces withdrew from Korea in late June 1949 and left behind approximately 500 military advisors.
47. Memorandum of Conversation by Muccio, August 13, 1949, 895.00, quoted in Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, p. 393.
48. The actual initial North Korean operations in June 25, 1950 were clearly designed to avoid being flanked by South Korean troops on the Ongjin peninsula. The KPA deployed the 3rd Board Constabulary Brigade and the 14th Regiment of the 6th Division commanded by General

Pang Ho San on the Ongjin peninsula. These initial North Korean troop dispositions can be construed as holding actions to hold South Korean flank forces in place while the main shock troops - roughly five North Korean divisions and one armored brigade - moved on Seoul. Thus the South Korean reinforcement during the major border conflicts of 1949 on Ongjin cannot be dismissed as shallow strategic thinking as is seen in the opposition of American military advisors. Reinforcements could hold North Korean forces on the Ongjin peninsula, thus making it difficult for the North to attack Seoul when US forces were about to withdraw from the South. If the North tried to move the forces along the Kaesong-Munsan corridor with South Korean reinforcements left on the Ongjin peninsula, the flanking of Northern troops by South Korean forces through Haeju and Kaesong would disrupt the strategic plan of the North. Hence Kim Il Sung's obsession with the Ongjin peninsula as seen in his Ongjin occupation plan. For North Korean invading routes and troop dispositions, see Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1961), pp. 21-8; also Daily Intelligence Summary No. 2852, July 1, 1950, FEC, RG 338. For the views of US military advisors, see KMAG G-2 Periodic Report No. 1122. For the Korean Army station list, see KMAG G-3 Operations Report No. 6.

49. August 27, 1949, *Soviet Documents*.

50. Robert Simmons, based on the writing of the Soviet defector Yuri A. Rastvorov, argued that "it was Colonel General and Ambassador to Pyongyang, Terrenty F. Shtykov, who sold Stalin on the idea of the war." Yet Shtykov's briefing to Stalin shows that Shtykov was critical of Kim's²² adventurous scheme. See Simmons, *The Strained Alliance*, p. 119.

51. Shtykov to Vyshinsky, September 3, 1949 in Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack?" p. 6.

52. Gromyko to Tunkin, September 11, 1949 in Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack?" p. 6.

53. Tunkin to Soviet Foreign Ministry, September 14, 1949 in Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack?" pp. 6-7.

54. Intelligence Estimate by OIR, Jun 25, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 150.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

56. The English translation of the Politbureau decision is from Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack?" pp. 7-8.

57. The encouragement to dispatch guerrilla forces was in accordance with the Soviet policy line which Stalin had been promoting through numerous Soviet press articles since the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the North at the end of 1948. For Soviet press articles on the guerrilla activities in the South, see Kirk to Acheson, July 27, 1949; also Kirk to Acheson, August 23, 1949; also Kirk

to Acheson, September 7, 1949, 895.00, RG 59.

58. See Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack?" p. 8.

59. KMAG G-2 Periodic Report No. 198; also KMAG G-3 Operations Report, No. 17.

60. October 24 and 27, 1949, *Soviet Documents*.

61. October 22, 1949, *Soviet Documents*.

62. Gromyko to Shtykov, October 27, 1949 in Weathersby, "The Soviet Role in the Early Phase of the Korean War," pp. 446-47. This telegram was also distributed to Stalin.

63. "Bruce Cumings's Letter to the Editor," *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7, p. 120.

64. FEC Intelligence Summaries Nos. 2611, 2618, 2625, 2632, 2646, 2652, 2655, 2659, 2674, 2681, 2688, 2694, 2710, and 2715. Intelligence Summary No. 2715 is dated February 14, 1950. Stalin expressed his desire to approve the North Korean invasion on January 30, 1950. Thereafter no major border incidents occurred. Cumings argues that "attacks from both sides across the parallel on the Ongjin peninsula continued through the end of 1949." Yet he fails to specify whether these "attacks" represented major border conflicts or minor patrol skirmishes. For Cumings's view, see "Cumings's letter to the editor," p. 120. The Soviet equivalent of the KMAG intelligence reports, that is, the reports of Soviet advisors in North Korea, if available, will help us to further clarify the nature of border clashes before the war.²³

65. Some researchers consider Stalin's surprise as evidence of Kim's autonomous decision to go to war. For this view, see Wilbur W. Hitchcock, "North Korea Jumps the Gun," *Current History* (March 1951), pp. 136-44; also Simmons, *The Strained Alliance*, p. 123.

66. Shtykov to Vyshinsky, January 19, 1950 in Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack?" p. 8.

67. This fact contradicts Flemming's claim that the Korean War represented the transfer of decision-making from the major powers to small allies: "[T]he Korean War demonstrated that the extent to which a balance of power conflict is likely to transfer the power of decision from the major powers to small allies, who may be entirely irresponsible, or worse, but gain the power to commit their principals." I.F. Stone also argued that "in Korea the big powers were the victim, among other things, of headstrong satellites itching for a showdown which Washington, Moscow, and Peking had long anticipated but were alike anxious to avoid." For the views of Flemming and Stone, see D. F. Flemming, *The Cold War and its Origins, 1950-1960*, Vol. II (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 608; also Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War*, p. xxi.

68. The US was not concerned about the military aspect of Japan's security since MacArthur

dismissed the possibility of successful Soviet military invasion of the main islands of Japan. Emergency War Plan MOONRISE confirmed his view. For MarArthur's view, see US Senate, Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Military Situation in the Far East*, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 254. For MOONRISE, see JWPC 476/1, June 16, 1947, CCS 381 USSR (3-2-46) Sec. 5, RG 218.

⁶⁹. Stalin to Kim Il Sung, October 8, 1950 in Alexander Mansourov, "Stalin, Mao, Kim and China's Decision to Enter the Korean War, September 16-October 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives," *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 6-7 (Winter 1995-1996), p. 116. This telegram provides us a rare opportunity to understand Stalin's strategic objectives in his rollback in Korea. This telegram supports Kennan's view that one of the reasons for Stalin's decision to approve and support the North Korean invasion had something to do with the unilateral move of the US to sign a peace treaty with Japan. See George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon, 1967), pp. 490-8; also Allen Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 34-8.

⁷⁰. The term *cordon sovietaire* is a play on the term of *cordon sanitaire* (sanitary zone) which emerged from the Versailles Treaty to prevent the spread of Communism to Europe after the Bolshevik Revolution along the belt of states from Finland to Romania. See R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), p. 727.

⁷¹. George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, p. 359.

24

⁷². Memorandum by John Foster Dulles, June 29, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 238. Dulles wrote this memorandum on his way back to Washington from a trip to South Korea and Japan just before the outbreak of the war. In the same memorandum, he recommended direct American military intervention in the war.

⁷³. Intelligence Estimate by the Office of Intelligence Research (OIR), June 25, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 151.

⁷⁴. Hans J. Morgenthau, a founding father of international relations theory, criticizes theorists' tendency to reduce the concept of power in international politics "to the actual application of force or at least to equate it with successful threats of force." This tendency results in the neglect of prestige as an independent element in international politics. In Morgenthau's view, the pursuit of prestige results from the attempt "to impress other nations with the power one's own nation actually possesses, or with the power it believe, or wants the other nations to believe, it possesses." For Morgenthau's views, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 6th ed., Kenneth W. Thompson, rev. (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 34-89.

⁷⁵. Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Da Capo, 1967), p. 42.

⁷⁶. Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 456.

⁷⁷. George Kennan argues that “it [the Kremlin] is by no means unamenable to consideration of prestige.” For Kennan’s view, see “X” [George F. Kennan], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (July 1947), p. 575.

⁷⁸. Stalin’s Telegram to Mao is quoted in “Stalin to Kim Il Sung, October 8 [7], 1950” in Alexander Mansourov, *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷⁹. Acheson defines prestige as “the shadow cast by power.” For the view of Acheson, see Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 405. Melvyn P. Leffler argues that the US sought a preponderance of power in the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. He claims that “Strategic air power, financial hegemony, and economic predominance were thought sufficient to thwart any prospective Soviet drive for preponderance.” Yet our analysis of Stalin’s rollback and Acheson’s response demonstrates that the two superpowers never considered these material sources of power sufficient in the struggle for preponderant power in the Cold War. See Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 16-9.

⁸⁰. Acheson emphasized that the defeat of Stalin’s rollback must be achieved “without dropping²⁵ matches in the power keg which would blow the world to smithereens.” See “Notes on Meeting in Secretary’ Office on MacArthur Testimony,” May 16, 1951, box 63, Dean Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸¹. See Adam B. Ulam, *The Communists*, p. 79; also Sergei N. Goncharov, et al., *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 187-92; also Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea,” p. 32.

⁸². Goncharov, et al., *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁸³. Goncharov, et al., *ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

⁸⁴. In his analysis of the Soviet policy to the Far East, Cumings argues that “Soviet strategy in 1947-1948 pointed toward a transnational sphere of influence in Northeast Asia.” In Cumings’s view, Stalin gave up this strategy after Mao’s victory because of “the low priority of Manchuria and Korea in Soviet global calculations.” Yet recently declassified documents show that Stalin still hoped to consolidate the transnational unit in the Far East. For Cumings’s view, see *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, pp. 356-57.

85. The term “strategic complex” was used in the US Defense Department draft of NSC 81/1 which authorized UN forces to cross the thirty-eighth parallel. See “U.S. Courses of Action,” July 31, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 506.

86. Goncharov, et al., *ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

88. Clubb to Rusk, November 7, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 1091.

89. Stalin to Kim Il Sung, October 8, 1950 in Mansourov, *ibid.*, p. 116.

90. Goncharov, et al., *ibid.*, p. 214.

91. Interview with V. P. Tkachenko, former head of the Korean Section of the Central Committee, CPSU, March 30, 1992, quoted in Goncharov, et. al. *Uncertain Partners*, p. 101.

92. For the text of Acheson’s speech, see “Press Release No. 34,” January 12, 1950, box 22, Office Files of Marshall D. Shulmann, RG 59. Cumings claims that Acheson’s original speech note was destroyed (Cumings, *ibid.*, p. 421). Yet the note was kept and released in the Shulmann Files. For the note, see “Notes for Far East Speech before National Press Club,” January 12, 1950, box 18, Office Files of Marshall Shulmann, RG 59.

26

93. For Acheson’s view, see Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 357.

94. Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*, Harold Shukman, trans. (London: Hutchinson, 1989), p. 102; also Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1991), p. 141.

95. For the text of Mao-Yudin conversation on March 31, 1956, see Dieter Heinzig, “Stalin, Mao, Kim and Korean War Origins, 1950: A Russian Documentary Discrepancy,” *CWIHP Bulletin*, Nos. 8-9, p. 240.

96. Stalin to Shtykov, January 30, 1950 in Weathersby, “To Attack, or Not to Attack?” p. 9. It is the conventional wisdom that Stalin and Kim met for the first time during the latter’s visit to Moscow of March 1949. Yet recently declassified Soviet documents show that Kim met Stalin in 1946, accompanied by Park Hon Young. Thus they met at least twice before the secret meeting of April 1950. See March 20, 1950, *Soviet Documents*; also “Stalin’s Meeting with Kim Il Sung, Moscow,” March 5, 1949 in Weathersby, “To Attack, or Not to Attack?” p. 6.

97. April 1950 (undated) in Weathersby, “The Soviet Role in the Early Phase of the Korean War,” p. 430.

98. Shtykov to Vyshinsky, May 12, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” pp. 38-9.

99. Shtykov to Zakharov, June 26, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 39.

100. For Kim’s view, see Shtykov to Vyshinsky, September 3, 1949 and January 19, 1950 in Weathersby, “To Attack, or Not To Attack?” pp. 6, 8.

¹⁰¹. In reality, the US also created the “fig leaves” to conceal the truth about the Soviet role in the North Korean attack as the expression was used in the State Department during the Korean War. A case in point is Truman’s statement of June 27 which summarized US actions in collaboration with the UN to support South Korea. The phrase “Communist imperialism, centrally directed as it is” in the original draft was replaced by the more ambiguous term “Communism.” George Kennan also urged Acheson not to make the Soviet Union directly and publicly responsible for the North Korean attack. The meeting note of the Policy Planning Staff of June 27, 1950 reads as follows: “11:00 A.M., GFK [George F. Kennan] - Success must be overriding factor. *Don’t directly link closely to USSR*” (emphasis added). These are just a few evidence that the US made deliberate efforts to avoid getting involved in a general war on the Korean peninsula. For the text of Truman’s statement, see *FRUS*, 1950, VII, 202-3. For the original draft of Truman’s statement, see box 243, Korean War File, Presidential Secretary’s File (PSF), Harry S. Truman Library. For Kennan’s view, see “Notes of Meeting,” June 27, 1950,²⁷ box 78, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, 1947-1953, RG 59.

102. June 22, 1950, *Soviet Documents*.

103. Shtykov to Stalin, July 4, 1950 in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 43.

104. Stalin to Shtykov, July 6, 1950, in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 43.

¹⁰⁵. Kim Il Sung and Park Hon-Yong to Stalin, September 29, 1950 in Mansourov, *ibid.*, p. 112.

106. The amount of loans appears in the unit of ruble in the *Soviet Documents*. I calculated rubles into dollars by using the official exchange rate of US \$1 = 4 rubles. For the official exchange rate, see Goncharov, et al., *Uncertain Partners*, p. 100. For the amount of barter trade and Soviet loans, see February 4 and 9, March 9 and 14, 1950, *Soviet Documents*.

107. For the amount of the Soviet loan to the PRC, see Goncharov, et al., *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁰⁸. Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, p. 446.

¹⁰⁹. The Joseph Stalin 3 (JS-3) was the heaviest tank in the Soviet armored forces at the time. The latest JS-1 and JS-2 had the same tonnage as that of the JS-3. See “Sixty-Ton Tank in Korea,” July 9, 1950, box 8, Intelligence Reports, Theater Intelligence, FEC, RG 338.

¹¹⁰. Roberts to Bolte, September 13, 1949, box 548, P & O 091 Korea, RG 319.

¹¹¹. The old model of the T-34 was equipped with the high-velocity 76mm gun. See “Spot Reports of Captured Soviet Weapons and Equipments during the Korean War,” box 2, MIS (D/A) Intelligence Division, Target Branch, FEC, RG 338. For the 105th Tank Brigade of the North with 40 T-34 medium tanks in each regiment, see ATIS Interrogation Report No. 273, in Daily Intelligence Report No. 2883, FEC, RG 338.

¹¹². Goncharov, et al., *ibid.*, pp. 187-92; also Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 196-200. These scholars claim that by renegeing on air cover Stalin planted the seed for a future China-Soviet split.

¹¹³. See July 2, 5, and 7, *Soviet Documents*. The translation of Stalin’s telegram of July 5 is found in Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” p. 43. For further elaboration on the issue of Soviet air cover, see Mansourov, *ibid.*, p. 103. 28

¹¹⁴. For the US objection to Syngman Rhee’s belligerent policy, see Memorandum of Conversation by Muccio, May 10, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. VII, p. 1017.

¹¹⁵. Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 245.

¹¹⁶. For the distinction between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction, see Max Weber, “Politics As A Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 120.