

15 April 1947

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SOVIET POLITICAL STRATEGY IN KOREA

The release, on April 11, of a letter from Secretary Marshall to Soviet Minister Molotov calling for a speedy reconvention of the Joint Commission, brings into focus the problem of Soviet political strategy in Korea. It should be as evident now as it was last June that the Soviet plan, openly presented, of assuring Moscow line parties in Korea with controlling interest in consultations and in any future government of Korea, which the Soviets read into the Moscow Decision, will never be acceptable to the three Allied Powers who would have to ratify any final agreement. The nature of guarantees of "democratic freedoms" demonstrated during 1946 by United Front parties, wherever they have been set up in power with the help of the Soviet arms is no longer a matter for conjecture. It would be surprising indeed if, after a long series of protests by the United States Government regarding the abrogation of political freedoms in such countries as Bulgaria and Poland, the Soviets would expect acquiescence on the part of the other Great Powers in the establishment of leftist absolutism in Korea. Every indication shows that this particular method of guaranteeing security to the boundaries of the USSR is particularly abhorrent to US foreign policy, and that any attempts to extend its application will be actively opposed. In substance this would mean that unless the Soviet Delegation to the Joint Commission abandoned its avowed objective, namely the formation of a United Front (i.e. Communist) controlled provisional government, there would be a certain deadlock between the two occupying powers in Korea, even if a mutually-acceptable verbal formula for reopening were found. The presumption is that the Soviets are as fully aware of the situation as the Americans. The question arises: Is the Soviet Union prepared to scale down its demands, to arrive at a compromise solution within the framework of the Moscow Decision; and if not, what are the alternatives and the tactics implicit in them?

There have been no indications, here or anywhere else, before or after President Truman's speech on aid to Greece and Turkey, of any softening in the Soviet stand on any matter whatsoever pertaining to Soviet security. Barring an unexpected reversal of the basic pattern of the Soviet foreign policy since Potsdam, a compromise on Korea, where the Soviets frankly admit that their security interest is paramount, should be regarded as very unlikely at this time. This would be particularly true with reference to the current conditions in the Far East, where Soviet interests are evidently threatened by the American abandonment of attempts to mediate between the Nationalists and the Communist.

The alternatives which would arise before the Soviets should the Joint Commission fail to reconvene this summer, or should it arrive at another stalemate, would be: (1) Continued division of Korea, with separate governments in each; (2) Compromise solution, outside the framework of the Moscow Decision, either by direct negotiation between the USSR and the US, or by all four signatories of the Decision; (3) Solution through the intermediacy of the United Nations.

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Soviet Political Strategy in Korea, cont'd.

A. Continued division of Korea.

The fundamental assumption here is that this cannot be a permanent solution, for a variety of good reasons, such as the weight of the world's public opinion and strong U.S. commitments toward a unified Korea. In substance, this solution is based on the ability of one side to outwait the other, in such a way as to be in position to force eventually a more favorable agreement for unification. Most of the indications here seem to favor the United States, with its indicated readiness and ability to finance major reconstruction of industry and agriculture, and provide needed food and commodities. In the face of continuing shortages of food and materials in Russia, the cost of keeping up with America would be nearly prohibitive if the Soviets wanted to maintain their prestige in East Asia and avoid aggravation of growing discontent in Northern Korea. Any building up of America's prestige in Korea would be a very undesirable development from the Soviet point of view, and attempts to combat it would inevitably lead to further unwanted friction between the US and the USSR. It would seem, accordingly, that if any plan of a separate, Communist Northern Korea has been ever entertained by the Soviets (which is doubtful) it would have been given up under the impact of a positive US policy of aid and assistance in South Korea. It is further probable that in the particular instance of Korea, the Soviets are not in a position to wait, if only because of the economic and political cost involved in waiting.

B. Compromise Solution.

Such a solution can be assumed to entail a departure from the Moscow Decision formula in such a way as to speed up the establishment of a unified Korean government. The stumbling blocks in the Decision are evidently the trusteeship provision and the determination of proper groups to be consulted in the establishment of a Provisional Government. As it should be fairly clear by now, in the Soviet view the cost of trusteeship (i.e., of participation by other powers in the reconstruction of Korea) is the acceptance by other powers of the proposition that only the United Front, party-line groups, should be considered as "democratic." In this connection it may be well to recall the Soviet efforts to credit the United States with originating the trusteeship provision in the Moscow Decision (TASS release, issued to the Korean press in Seoul by General Shtikov on 26 January 1945). The obvious compromise might well consist of bypassing the trusteeship provision altogether, as a great Soviet concession, and of agreeing to the election of a Constituent Assembly which would establish a Korean government. Such a solution would have the virtue of bypassing the difficult problem of whom to consult. An inevitable corollary to it would be an agreement on troop withdrawal at an early date, following the carefully supervised general election.

Evidence is at hand that some such scheme has been already contemplated by the Soviets, and may still form the real core of a long-range strategy for Korea.

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Soviet Political Strategy in Korea, Cont'd.

The scheme is reflected in the CIC report known as the "Joint Soviet Communist Master Plan on Korea" which is based on two separate outlines of the party's long-term strategy, communicated at various times by highly-rated informers. One is based on confidential statements by KIM Il Sung as of December 1945; another, on similar statements by a highly placed communist leader in Seoul in June 1946. In substance, the plan provides for the military training of a large contingent of Koreans in the North within the period of two to three years; simultaneously, in the South, the way is prepared for the troop-withdrawal demand by the Soviets through gradual suzerainty in the underground of the Communists, and the setting up of a coalition government based on cooperation between the Rightists and well-camouflaged communist auxiliaries. The withdrawal demand would come at the time when the Communist influence in the South becomes, ostensibly, so weak, that the American forces will be unafraid to withdraw. The withdrawal would be followed by seizure of power by the Leftists, who in the meantime will have infiltrated South Korea constabulary and police.

The overall pattern is closely reminiscent of the Soviet tactics in the early 1920's (Armenia) (Georgia) and more recent ones (Iranian Azerbaijan). Assuming that because of its high evaluation, the Master Plan is genuine, and granting that many recent developments in the two Koreas seem to be consistent with the outline,<sup>1/</sup> the following limitations must be noted in order to determine its current validity:

- a. The plan reflects only the Korean share of information, and is stated in terms of the Communist Party objectives.
- b. The knowledge of the plan has been publicized by the Americans, and may have influenced local American policies.
- c. Some of the tactics implicit in the plan have been vitiated in part through the establishment of the Coalition Committee, the Legislative Assembly, preparations for the general election, and extensive loss of prestige by the Communist Party.
- d. World picture has sharply changed since mid-1945 with America openly on the warpath against Communist expansion.

<sup>1/</sup> In the North: Pre training of armed contingents has been intensified, and a People's Army is reported in existence since February. In the South: Following the emergence of the South Korean Labor Party, the Communists have gone underground; the leadership in it and auxiliaries has been assumed by front men like HO, Hun; there has been an intensification of infiltration of leftists in the ranks of police and the constabulary.

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Authority NND 68138

*Secret*  
Soviet Political Strategy in Korea, Cont'd.

e. Far Eastern picture has likewise changed, with the American withdrawal from China, evidence of closer ties with the Nationalists (Sino-American Commercial Treaty), and emergence of Manchuria as a relatively invulnerable stronghold of Sino-Communism. This last development minimizes the immediate strategic value of Korea to Russia.

The adjustments in the hypothetical revision of the Master Plan may be roughly charted from the recent developments in Northern Korea. They seem to reflect the changing political scene, and suggest that although the old master plan is no longer fully applicable, there is currently less hope than ever of reuniting Korea on the basis of the Moscow Decision in its present form:

a. Dropping the word "interim" from the name of the North Korean legislative body following a popular election.

b. Elements of de facto recognition by the Soviets of a North Korean government, implicit in Molotov's congratulatory message to the newly elected executive legislative body, and also in the Soviet insistence that the American Command deal directly with its chairman, KIM, Il Sung.

(Implications from a and b: Americans would have to deal, in any unification parleys, with an established North Korean Government, something not anticipated in the Moscow Decision.)

c. Over consolidation of power in both the executive/legislative body and in its executive committee in the hands of the North Korean Labor Party and of the group of "independents".

(Implications: Americans and South Koreans would have to deal with a typical Soviet "block of party members and non-party bolsheviks")

d. Large scale withdrawal of Soviet units from North Korea, and transfer of security functions, including border control, to Korean security forces.

e. Establishment of a People's Army armed with Russian weapons including artillery and tanks; existence of large officer-candidates' training schools.

(Implications: from c and e: The demand for simultaneous troop withdrawal may come much sooner than anticipated in the "Master Plan"; such a demand may be predicated on a prior complete Soviet withdrawal).

f. Persistent reports of close military cooperation between the North Korean armed forces and the Sino-Communist forces in Manchuria, including the use of Korean transport, bases, and training facilities by the latter. Reports of participation of North Korean units in military operations in Manchuria.

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Soviet Political Strategy in Korea, Cont'd.

g. Persistent reports of extension of North Korean authority over the Korean-populated border province of Kando in Manchuria.

(Implications: Master-plan, as amended, may be closely tied to a projected Chinese settlement, based on the recognition of an autonomous Communist Manchuria allied with North Korea.)

C. SOLUTION IN THE UNITED NATIONS.

Because of the evident connection between a Korean solution and the problem of a Chinese settlement, and probable (and understandable) Soviet unwillingness to admit the Chinese to a quadrilateral discussion of the Moscow Decision on Korea, the Soviets may well attempt to present the Korean problem before the Security Council. The Soviet hope for a mistrial or a favorable judgement would depend on the composition of the Council and of any special commission set up for the investigation of the Korean problem. Veto power wielded by the USSR and influence over individual members of the Council and the Commission would provide adequate safeguards against a completely unfavorable decision. Prior troop withdrawal by the Soviets may well be utilized as an argument for a similar action by the U. S. The desired net result would look toward the eventual application of the "Master Plan, amended."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Unless a thorough reorientation of the Soviet policy toward the small nations lying within the Soviet security zone takes place as a result of vigorous pressure by the United States, the USSR will persist in demanding an "independent, friendly Korea which could not become a springboard for an attack on the USSR". Under the Soviet definition this would mean a Korean People's Republic, based on the People's committee form of government, controlled by a United Front coalition under a Communist leadership. The Soviet tactics seem to consist of two lines of defense:

a. An attempt to force the implementation of the Moscow Decision on Korea in such a way as to safeguard Communist control by the insistence on a unilateral definition of the word "democratic" to include only those parties and leaders who unquestioningly abide by the Communist Party line. The failure on this line would inevitably lead to the line.

b. based on "defense in depth", and consisting in prearranged conditions for the conversion of Korea into a Soviet satellite by means of an internal revolution. Such a development is to be preceded by the establishment of a bona fide unified Korean government, by either renegotiation of the Moscow Decision by the signatories or through the intermediacy of the United Nations. The formation of such a government would be predicated

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Soviet Political Strategy in Korea, Cont'd.

on the abandonment of the trusteeship provisions and agreement on simultaneous troop withdrawal. The subsequent conversion of Korea into a "People's Republic" on the pattern of Outer Mongolia would be accomplished through the Use of force by local Communists after both American and Soviet troops are withdrawn.

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