

**SPECIAL**  
**NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE**

**PROBABLE REACTIONS OF COMMUNIST CHINA,  
THE USSR, AND THE FREE WORLD TO CERTAIN  
US COURSES OF ACTION IN KOREA**



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*The Intelligence Advisory Committee concurred in this estimate on 2 March 1954. See, however, footnotes of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army, and of the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State, to the next to the last sentence of paragraph 10. The FBI abstained, the subject being outside of its jurisdiction.*

*The following member organizations of the Intelligence Advisory Committee participated with the Central Intelligence Agency in the preparation of this estimate: The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.*

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

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**PROBABLE REACTIONS OF COMMUNIST CHINA, THE USSR,  
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ACTION IN KOREA**

**THE PROBLEM**

To examine probable reactions of Communist China, the USSR, and countries in the Free World to certain US courses of action against Communist China in the event hostilities in Korea are resumed as a consequence of Communist aggression there during 1954.

**ASSUMPTIONS**

- A. The US objective is limited to expelling Communist armed forces from Korea.
- B. The US would announce this objective immediately after the renewal of hostilities.
- C. In response to the Communist aggression, the US immediately would:
  - 1. Conduct air attacks, with atomic weapons when militarily desirable and authorized, against:
    - a. Military targets in Korea; and

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b. Those military targets<sup>1/</sup> which directly support Communist military operations in Korea or which threaten the security of US-UN forces and which are located either:

(1) In the general vicinity of Korea (i.e., the area bounded by and including Kirin-Mukden-Tientsin-Tsinan-Tsingtao); or

(2) Anywhere in China or Manchuria.

(In either (1) or (2) above to avoid attacking Port Arthur and Dairen)

2. Simultaneously, exploit as practicable such success as may be gained as a result of action outlined above, by coordinated ground, naval, and air action to destroy enemy forces in Korea.

D. The US might undertake at a later date the following supporting or diversionary actions:

1. Blockade of the China coast;
2. Large-scale Chinese Nationalist raids on the China mainland;
3. Seizure of Hainan Island.

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<sup>1/</sup> Targets would include military concentrations, airfields, naval bases, military installations, and transportation systems, etc., even if these targets were adjacent to or within urban concentrations.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. It is possible that the Bloc leaders, in deciding upon a new act of aggression in Korea, deliberately chose Korea as the place most desirable for initiating general war. Or, in light of the repeated US warnings, they may at least have considered general war a highly probable consequence of their aggression, and been willing to accept the consequences. In this case, their reactions to the assumed US courses of action would presumably be in accordance with their strategic plans for such a war, which we do not undertake to estimate in this paper.

2. However, we have estimated previously and still believe that the Chinese Communists will not deliberately undertake courses of action which they believe would involve serious risk of US action against the Chinese mainland. We have also estimated and still believe that the Communists will try to avoid courses of action which clearly involve substantial risk of general war.

3. We therefore believe it more probable that the Communists, while realizing that their aggression would involve a risk of US action against mainland China, would nevertheless have estimated that this risk was not so great as to be unacceptable. It is unlikely that the Communists would have misunderstood the US warnings, although they might have underestimated US determination to carry them through with atomic weapons. Or they might believe that they could so conceal their aggression as to make such US action infeasible. Whatever their reasoning may have been, we believe that they would in these circumstances react to the assumed US courses of action in the ways described in the following paragraphs.

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## II. COMMUNIST REACTIONS

### A. Initial Reactions

4. Regardless of US assurances concerning its objectives, the Chinese Communists would view the bombing of military targets in China and Manchuria (Assumption C) as a grave threat to their regime. The assumed US courses of action would almost certainly impel the Communists to reassess the strategic situation in Asia and particularly their military posture in Korea. Nevertheless, we believe that they would not react by immediately abandoning their military position in Korea. The Chinese Communists would, to the extent that their then available capabilities permitted, counter the US action with maximum countermeasures, probably including:

- a. Maintenance of military operations in Korea;
- b. Air defense by the Communist Air Force in China (CAFIC); and
- c. Air strikes against US targets in Korea and US bases on Okinawa.

Initially, the Communists might refrain, for political reasons, from attacking US bases in Japan.

5. The USSR is bound to Communist China by close ties of interest and ideology as well as by the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950. It is therefore possible that the USSR might intervene directly and overtly even at the outset of the fighting, especially if the Kremlin considered that vital Soviet security interests were endangered. We believe, however, that the Kremlin would not estimate that the assumed US courses of action had made general war inevitable, and that it would seek at first to counter the US actions by measures which it believed

would involve a minimum risk of precipitating an attack on the USSR itself. Thus, the USSR would provide all possible logistic support to the Chinese Communists. It would probably support Chinese Communist air defense operations, including committing elements of its Far Eastern air forces, but would endeavor to conceal its participation. It might also covertly commit Soviet submarines. We believe, however, that the Kremlin would not, at this stage of the fighting, commit substantial identifiable Soviet forces beyond the limits of Communist-held territory.

6. In connection with their resumption of hostilities, the Communists would make every effort to persuade the world that the ROK or the US, not the Communists, was the aggressor. In so doing, they would exploit their own capabilities for deception and subterfuge, the confused situation created by President Rhee's frequent avowals of an intention to renew hostilities unilaterally, and the suspicion with which much of the non-Communist world views Syngman Rhee. In addition, the Communists would react vigorously on the political front to the US counteractions and would:

- a. Attempt to gain support, particularly in Asia, for the charge that the US was using weapons of mass destruction against "non-military" targets;
- b. Appeal to the UN to condemn and halt US "aggression" and to sponsor negotiations for a cease-fire; and

- c. Attempt to divide the US from its allies by all other available diplomatic and propaganda means, including a threat to invoke the Sino-Soviet treaty.

**B. Subsequent Reactions**

7. Subsequent Communist reactions would depend to a large extent on how the military situation developed, particularly in terms of the degree of damage inflicted by US action. The Communists would continue to assert their willingness to negotiate a settlement in Korea. However, we consider it unlikely that the Communists would withdraw their forces from Korea as long as their military position there and their position at home remained tenable.

8. If the USSR concluded that the US was about to expel Communist forces from Korea and to take up a position along the border of North Korea, the USSR would almost certainly accept increased risks to protect its own strategic interests in the area and would expand further its unavowed participation, including even committing its own ground forces in the guise of volunteers. The CAFIC might attempt to make air attacks on Japan. There is some slight chance that the USSR might even provide atomic weapons with delivery units to CAFIC. We believe, however, that the USSR would still seek to avoid further expansion of the area of conflict.

9. If the US expanded its operations against China by a blockade of the China coast, by sponsoring and supporting large-scale Chinese Nationalist raids on the China mainland, and/or by seizure of Hainan Island, the Communists would become convinced that the US, despite its announced objective, intended to



destroy the Chinese Communist regime. In such circumstances, the Chinese Communists would probably take Hong Kong if the UK had by this time committed itself to supporting the assumed US action. Moreover, the Chinese Communist might undertake an invasion of Indochina as a diversionary measure.

10. If the Kremlin estimated that the Chinese Communist regime was about to be destroyed or lost to the Bloc, the Kremlin would have to decide whether to seek an end to the war by the withdrawal of Communist armed forces from Korea or to take such additional overt measures to support its ally as the military situation seemed to demand, including, if necessary, the open commitment of Soviet ground, naval, and air forces using all weapons. There is now no adequate basis for a confident estimate of the probable Kremlin decision in this case as this decision would be greatly influenced by the cause of events leading up to the situation we predicate. It is possible that the Kremlin might think it worthwhile temporarily to sacrifice North Korea if such a sacrifice appeared necessary and sufficient to save the Chinese Communist regime and the Chinese Communist alliance. On the other hand, if the Kremlin estimated that the situation was such that the Chinese Communist regime could not be saved except by giving it overt Soviet military assistance as noted above, the USSR might give such assistance even at grave risk of expanding the area of conflict beyond the issues at stake in Asia.<sup>2/</sup>

2/ The Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, feel that, given the situation postulated, this sentence minimizes the danger that the USSR would give all out assistance to Communist China rather than accept its loss to the bloc. They believe that the Kremlin would probably regard the loss of Communist China as an intolerable blow to Soviet strength and security and as an encouragement to further US military pressure on the remainder of the bloc. They, therefore, believe that there would be the gravest danger that the Kremlin would not abandon its ally but would give it such full and open support as the military situation seemed to demand, even at the grave risk of expansion of the area of hostilities or of general war.

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However, even in this case we believe the Kremlin would attempt to localize the hostilities to the Far East.

### **III. FREE WORLD REACTIONS**

11. Among the general considerations which would shape the probable reactions of the non-Communist peoples of Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia to the assumed US courses of action is their concern that the US may become more deeply involved in the Far East. More important, however, is the widespread fear that renewal of war in Korea would lead to general war. The fear is strengthened by concern lest the Sino-Soviet treaty be invoked.

12. If the fact of Communist aggression were clouded or uncertain, US use of atomic weapons would be viewed unfavorably by most US allies. However, if they were convinced that the Communists had in fact initiated hostilities, they would probably reluctantly accept the US use of atomic weapons in North Korea, and probably accept their use in Manchuria and North China against those military targets in the general vicinity of Korea (Assumption C. b. (1) ) which are not adjacent to or within urban concentrations. With respect to other areas in China (Assumption C. b. (2) ), they would probably not oppose US atomic attacks on Chinese Communist air bases, if those bases were being used for attacks against US or allied forces. In any event, the European allies of the US, and the peoples of the non-Communist world generally, would not support the use of atomic weapons by the US against military targets which are adjacent to or within urban concentrations. They almost certainly would not consider that the issues of the Korean war justified such an act, even in the event of renewed Communist aggression.

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13. The allies of the US would probably not oppose a naval blockade of Communist China if the Korean war were resumed. However, most of them would probably object to the extension by the US of hostilities to any part of China beyond the general vicinity of Korea, whether by seizure of Hainan, by large-scale Nationalist raids on the mainland, or by air attacks other than those against air bases being used for attacks against US or allied forces.

14. The reaction of the governments and peoples of Asia and the Pacific to the assumed courses of action would be mixed. Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Nationalist China, the Philippines, and Pakistan would almost certainly support, and India, Burma, and Indonesia oppose the US action. The attitude of Japan and Thailand would probably hinge upon their estimates of the imminence of the Communist threat to themselves, with each seeking initially to maintain a neutral role. The reaction of remaining Asian countries, and of those of the Middle East, except Greece and Turkey, would probably be adverse to the US action.

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