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Review by **John Garver**, Georgia Institute of Technology

This interesting and well-researched article addresses the question of whether Stalin in January 1949 urged Mao Zedong and the CCP not to cross the Yangtze River. Based on statements by Mao and Zhou Enlai as early as the 1950s that Stalin had issued such a recommendation, scholars generally concluded that such a recommendation had been conveyed by Soviet envoy Anastas Mikoyan during a visit to the CCP center in January 1949. Later scholars enjoying access to Soviet-era documents found no evidence of such a recommendation. This, bolstered by an a priori assumption that Stalin would certainly have welcomed a united Communist-ruled China as an ally in the world struggle against imperialism, led many scholars to reject the proposition of a Soviet bid to halt at the Yangtze the CCP's advance across China. But how, then, to account for the statements by Mao and Zhou, who, as Kim points out, were closest to the actual events?

Kim's surmise is that Mao and Zhou were extrapolating from a recommendation from Stalin, that the CCP enter into peace talks with the KMT, perhaps under Soviet and American mediation. Such an approach would confer on the CCP, Stalin urged Mao, "the banner of peace --- an important weapon" in the struggle underway in China. Kim, drawing on recently published materials from the Soviet archives, substantiates that such a message was carried by Mikoyan, and by cables directly from Stalin to Mao. Kim documents too Mao's swift and unequivocal rejection of such a course as simply delaying the CCP's full liberation of all China. Mao and Zhou concluded from this episode that Stalin's real purpose was to divide China into two "dynasties," a CCP-ruled Northern Dynasty and a KMT-ruled Southern Dynasty. Since the PLA had not yet crossed the Yangtze River, a cease-fire as part of peace talks would have established that river as the de facto dividing line.

Kim believes that Mao and Zhou's surmise of Stalin's purpose was essentially accurate; Stalin did want to accomplish a de facto partition of China. Several purposes underlay this strategy, Kim argues. First of all, Stalin under-estimated the military capabilities of the

PLA, had a very high estimate of U.S. military capabilities, and over-estimated the likelihood of U.S. military intervention in China to prevent a complete communist take-over. A CCP push into south China might precipitate U.S. military intervention --- like the 1918-21 foreign intervention in Russia --- that could well result in establishment of a U.S.-allied Chinese state on Soviet borders. Better to take half-a-loaf and secure a CCP-led north China buffer for the USSR. The continuing confrontation between China's Northern and Southern Dynasties would ensure continuing Northern dependency on the USSR and, in the process, recently acquired Soviet privileges in Manchuria.

Kim's surmise regarding Stalin's second main purpose is even more interesting. Scholarship over the last decade or so regarding Stalin's calculations in green-lighting Kim Il Sung's war plan in 1950, suggests that Stalin believed that should the Americans intervene (contrary to their signals), the resulting war would be fought by China and would force the Americans to divert forces away from Europe, the critical theater in Stalin's eyes. Kim Donggil concludes that the same essential logic operated with the attempted partition of China into two "dynasties." China's KMT-ruled Southern Dynasty would require large numbers of U.S. troops and material that would otherwise be available for deployment to Europe. Kim Donggil quotes Stalin to Czech Communist leader Klement Gottwald shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War: "The United States has transferred its attention from Europe to the Far East. From the perspective of the world power balance, does all this have any benefit to us? Of course it does."

One intriguing question raised by Kim's article is why in the world Mao Zedong decided to ally with the USSR in 1949-50. There was a long history of policy conflicts between the Mao and Stalin over the CCP's drive for revolution in China. Stalin doubted the "class nature" of Mao and the CCP, and Mao had long struggled to render the CCP independent of the sort of Comintern controls typical of Moscow's relations with other "branch parties." Stalin had signed agreements in 1945 designed to uphold Chiang Kai-shek's power. Soviet forces had stripped Manchuria of industrial equipment. Moscow had turned Manchuria and Xinjiang into quasi-concessions. Now Kim Donggil tells us that Stalin plotted to partition China, creating a Communist-led Soviet dependency as a buffer state. The United States, on the other hand, had pursued, and in 1949 was still pursuing, a policy of supporting China's territorial unification, including Taiwan. It had recently supported China as the "policeman of Asia." The U.S. was a rich country able and ready to provide substantial economic assistance to friendly countries. By 1949 Washington was giving clear signals, understood by Mao, of its desire to work out a relation with new, Communist-ruled China, washing U.S. hands of Chiang Kai-shek and Taiwan in the process. And yet Mao opted to enter into a 30-year military-political alliance with the USSR committing the People's Republic of China to deploy "all available resources" in the event of a Soviet-U.S. war. Why?

Fanatical commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology must be the answer. That ideology informed Mao that capitalist United States was the enemy, and socialist USSR the friend, of "national liberation movements." China's "national liberation" required, Mao's Marxist-Leninist ideology informed him, imposing on China the same sort of political-economic system that was imposed on the USSR in the 1920-30s. Since Moscow had the most

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“experience” in “construction of socialism” of this sort, Soviet assistance would accelerate China’s own “advance” along the same path. The recent great advances of the world revolutionary movement meant that a cascade of revolution was bound to sweep across Asia, with strong, revolutionary China supporting that wave thereby restoring in a new Red form China’s bitterly-lost greatness. In short, ideology trumped national interest. China was the loser. The result was a thirty-year detour from China’s true, pragmatic rise to national greatness.

John Garver is a Professor in the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology. He has authored books on China's relations with the Soviet Union, United States, India, and Iran. Including *The Protracted Contest: Indian-Chinese Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (2001). He is currently working on China's response to the Persian Gulf crisis.

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