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CIRSPECIAL ARTICLE

THE SOVIET ROLE IN THE KOREAN WAR

Portraying itself as the champion of "peace," the Soviet Union has taken considerable pains to conceal or deny official involvement in the Korean war. This has been manifested in the denials that Soviet troops were in Manchuria, or that an "International Volunteer Force" existed or that the USSR has the power to intervene with "sovereign" North Korean and Chinese governments.

It is well established, however, that the Soviet Union exerts the ultimate control over events in Korea. Truce talks were initiated shortly after the Malik proposal, and the negotiations were resumed in October after Ambassador Kirk's strong representations to Vyshinsky. [REDACTED]

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In contrast to Soviet protestations of peace, current intelligence shows very active Russian support, both in men and in materiel, of the Communist war effort in Korea. This support has taken the form of active participation, during almost the entire course of the war, in command, advisory and technical roles, and in a combat role, in recent months, to the extent of flying jet interceptors and manning antiaircraft batteries. The Far East Command, [REDACTED] estimated in mid-September that upwards of 15,000 Russians were physically involved in the Korean War. Only 2,000 of these were believed engaged in non-military pursuits. While no exact statistics are known on the scale of Soviet logistic support, a substantial amount of Russian materiel has been captured or destroyed, and the supply effort must be very large.

The major role played by Soviet personnel has been advisory. Each North Korean division is currently estimated [REDACTED] to have at least ten Soviet officers and five enlisted men, and Chinese Communist divisions may have a comparable group. In addition to the estimated 2,000 Russians performing an actual advisory capacity with ground, air and naval units, command functions have been exercised at one time or another by various Soviet individuals. [REDACTED]

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The principal combat function performed by Soviet military personnel in Korea is in the field of air defense. Russian-piloted jet interceptor and conventional aircraft, Soviet-operated radar stations, and Soviet-served antiaircraft artillery are involved in this function. It is tentatively estimated that Russian personnel pilot about 150 jet interceptor and 25 long-range conventional fighter aircraft in almost daily and nightly combat missions in the air defense of northwestern Korea.

Although Soviet personnel are known to serve antiaircraft artillery, no firm figures of their total numbers are available. It has been estimated [REDACTED] however, that three Soviet antiaircraft divisions, totaling 6,000 troops, are deployed in the defense of North Korea. [REDACTED]

Soviet logistic support of Communist combatants in the Korean War has been substantial and continuous. Originally well-equipped with Soviet arms, the North Korean army lost most of this materiel and was completely re-equipped with greater emphasis on heavy weapons.

The Chinese Communist forces that entered Korea in October-November 1950 were equipped with a conglomeration of Chinese, Japanese, US and Soviet arms. By mid-summer of 1951, the Far East Command reported that the quantity of Soviet materiel in Chinese Communist hands had appreciably increased. During a 30-day period this fall the percentage of Soviet equipment captured from the Chinese Communists was as follows:

~~TOP SECRET SUEDE~~

~~TOP SECRET SUEDE~~

Small arms -- 66 percent
Light automatic weapons -- 69 percent
Machine guns -- 54 percent
Mortars -- 23 percent
Artillery -- 14 percent

Further evidence of this supply is seen in the destruction or capture by UN forces during the 18 months of the war of over 1,000 Soviet-manufactured armored vehicles. Despite these losses of armor, Communist forces in Korea now are estimated to have nearly 300 tanks, including the heavy Joseph Stalin tanks and self-propelled guns not heretofore encountered. The Soviet Union has furnished, at a minimum, sufficient equipment for 35 infantry and 7 armored divisions.

In the supply of aircraft, the Soviet Union has been prodigal. Communist China now has an air arm capable of giving its ground forces strong support, although unable to back up logistically its new-found strength. The Soviet Union has provided all the estimated 1,450 aircraft -- predominantly high performance jets -- now available to the Chinese Communist and the North Korean Air Forces, in addition to replacing combat and training losses which probably exceed 450 aircraft.

The UN Command claimed the destruction or capture of over 32,000 vehicles during the course of the war, and yet the Communist forces are able to maintain an estimated minimum of 10,000 trucks operating in North Korean rear areas. United Nations naval forces have destroyed over 1,100 Soviet-type mines during the course of operations to date.

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