The Fraternal Countries

It hardly made sense. He had done nothing to deserve this humiliation. I told my comrades I thought Svoboda should be put to constructive use and given a position worthy of his important contribution as the only military leader of the Czechoslovak army who had fought by our side against Germany. We had to do something to boost his prestige and to return him to active political life. My comrades in the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet Government agreed with me.

When I spoke to our Czechoslovak friends about my desire to see General Svoboda, I tried to impress on them that I considered him a good warrior and an honest comrade and therefore I couldn't just forget about him, as though he'd never existed. I asked them if they had anything against my meeting with Svoboda. I could tell that they weren't very happy about my request, but they knew I wouldn't take no for an answer. I wouldn't say they gave me their blessing, but they didn't do anything to stop me. They said that if I wanted to meet with Svoboda it was my own business. So I made a point of seeing him during our trip to Czechoslovakia.9

There are strong brotherly feelings for the Soviet Union among all the peoples of the Socialist countries, but I've always found the Bulgarians' friendship for us to be particularly ardent. Their feelings are understandable. Not all that many years have passed since the battlefields of Bulgaria were littered with the bones of Russian warriors who died winning Bulgaria's independence from the Turks.

9. L. Svoboda became President of Czechoslovakia after Novotny's fall in 1968 and put up a gallant resistance to Soviet bullying. Much earlier he had been the pro-Communist Minister of Defense under Beneš and, as such, had played an active part in the overthrow of parliamentary democracy in Czechoslovakia. He did not actually join the Communist Party until 1948 and was regarded with extreme suspicion by Stalin, who had him demoted in 1950. In 1951 he vanished from the scene, spent some time in prison, was released, and made a living as an accountant on a beekeeping cooperative. It is perfectly true that his return from obscurity was due entirely to Khrushchev. He had sunk so deep into anonymity that it took Novotny's minions quite a long time to discover where he was.

The Korean War

Here again the predominant impression is of the almost casual amateurishness with which Stalin approached problems not immediately affecting the security of the Soviet Union as he understood it. Presumably he received detailed advice about the Korean situation from his Foreign Ministry; but he seems to have encouraged the North Koreans without giving the matter serious thought. The important point emerging from this chapter is that Khrushchev makes no bones about North Korean responsibility for the war: he does not pretend that South Korea was guilty of aggression or even provocation. The whole affair, as presented by Khrushchev, was a North Korean invasion compounded by a gross miscalculation on Stalin's part. But it is also clear that Stalin saw his own error a great deal sooner than Khrushchev did. Khrushchev could not understand why his master withdrew all Soviet advisors and stood aloof—except for a propaganda barrage—when what should have been a walkover for the North Koreans developed into a major war. No wonder Stalin showed contempt for Khrushchev's suggestions. They were the suggestions of a man still wholly ignorant of the actual working of world forces—unaware, even, of the leading role played in the whole affair by the United Nations, as distinct from the USA.

About the time I was transferred from the Ukraine to Moscow at the end of 1949, Kim Il-sung arrived with his delegation to hold consultations with Stalin. The North Koreans wanted to prod South Korea with the point of a bayonet. Kim Il-sung said that the first poke would
touch off an internal explosion in South Korea and that the power of the people would prevail—that is, the power which ruled in North Korea. Naturally Stalin couldn't oppose this idea. It appealed to his convictions as a Communist all the more because the struggle would be an internal matter which the Koreans would be settling among themselves. The North Koreans wanted to give a helping hand to their brethren who were under the heel of Syngman Rhee. Stalin persuaded Kim Il-sung that he should think it over, make some calculations, and then come back with a concrete plan. Kim went home and then returned to Moscow when he had worked everything out. He told Stalin he was absolutely certain of success. I remember Stalin had his doubts. He was worried that the Americans would jump in, but we were inclined to think that if the war were fought swiftly—and Kim Il-sung was sure that it could be won swiftly—then intervention by the USA could be avoided.

Nevertheless, Stalin decided to ask Mao Tse-tung's opinion about Kim Il-sung's suggestion. I must stress that the war wasn't Stalin's idea, but Kim Il-sung's. Kim was the initiator. Stalin, of course, didn't try to dissuade him. In my opinion, no real Communist would have tried to dissuade Kim Il-sung from his compelling desire to liberate South Korea from Syngman Rhee and from reactionary American influence. To have done so would have contradicted the Communist view of the world. I don't condemn Stalin for encouraging Kim. On the contrary, I would have made the same decision myself if I had been in his place.

Mao Tse-tung also answered affirmatively. He approved Kim Il-sung's suggestion and put forward the opinion that the USA would not intervene since the war would be an internal matter which the Korean people would decide for themselves.

I remember a high-spirited dinner at Stalin's dacha. Kim Il-sung told us about the conditions of life in Korea, and he stressed the many attractive things about South Korea—the good soil and excellent climate for growing rice, the prosperous fishing industry, and so on. He said that after the reunification of South and North Korea, Korea as a whole would benefit. Korea would be able to ensure the supply of raw materials for her industry from the north and to meet the food requirements to feed her people from the fish, rice, and other agricultural products which flourished in the south. We wished every success to Kim Il-sung and toasted the whole North Korean leadership, looking forward to the day when their struggle would be won.

We had already been giving arms to North Korea for some time. It was obvious that they would receive the requisite quantity of tanks, artillery, rifles, machine guns, engineering equipment, and antiaircraft weapons. Our air force planes were being used to shield Pyongyang and were therefore stationed in North Korea.

The designated hour arrived and the war began. The attack was launched successfully. The North Koreans swept south swiftly. But what Kim Il-sung had predicted—an internal uprising after the first shots were fired and Syngman Rhee was overthrown—unfortunately failed to materialize. The elimination of Syngman Rhee and his clique was supposed to be accomplished with the advance of the North Korean troops. At first it looked as though Kim Il-sung had been right. The South Korean regime was unstable and wasn't able to defend itself. The resistance was weak. Syngman Rhee indeed didn't have much support within South Korea, but there still weren't enough internal forces for a Communist insurrection in South Korea. Apparently the Party's preparatory organizational work had been inadequate. Kim had believed that South Korea was blanketed with Party organizations and that the people would rise up in revolt when the Party gave the signal. But this never happened.

The North Koreans occupied Seoul. We were all delighted and again wished Kim Il-sung every success because this was a war of national liberation. It was not a war of one people against another, but a class war. Workers, peasants, and intelligentsia under the leadership of the Labor Party of North Korea, which then stood and today still stands on Socialist principles, were united in battle against the capitalists. This in itself was a progressive development.

However, just as Kim Il-sung's army got as far as Pusan, its strength gave out. This was the last port city in the south. It would have to be seized before the war could end. If it had been seized, Korea would have been united. It would no longer have been divided. It would have been a single powerful Socialist country, rich in raw materials, industry, and agriculture.

But that didn't happen. The enemy took advantage of the resistance organized by Syngman Rhee in Pusan. He had prepared his troops for a landing at Chemulpo. The landing assault was staged, and the situation became very serious for the North Koreans. Actually, the entire North Korean army in the south was cut off by this landing, and all its weapons fell into the hands of Syngman Rhee. It was a moment of cri-
Stalin was partly to blame for the precarious situation which the North Koreans were in. It's absolutely incomprehensible to me why he did it, but when Kim Il-sung was preparing for his march, Stalin called back all our advisors who were with the North Korean divisions and regiments, as well as all the advisors who were serving as consultants and helping to build up the army. I asked Stalin about this, and he snapped back at me, “It's too dangerous to keep our advisors there. They might be taken prisoner. We don't want there to be evidence for accusing us of taking part in this business. It's Kim Il-sung's affair.” So our advisors were recalled. As a result, the North Korean army was in trouble from the very start. When the pitched battles began after Che-mulpo, I took very much to heart the reports we received about the tragic situation Kim Il-sung had gotten himself into. I felt sorry for Kim Il-sung and once even suggested to Stalin:

"Comrade Stalin, wouldn't it be a good idea to lend more qualified help to Kim Il-sung? He wants to fight for his people to make all Korea free and independent. But he's not a military man himself, and now he's facing crack American units. Our ambassador to North Korea is a former Second Secretary of the Leningrad Regional Committee. Even though he's been given a wartime rank of lieutenant general, he's not a professional soldier. He hasn't ever had even basic military training, and his advice couldn't possibly substitute for the advice of a qualified man trained in the conduct of military operations. Now take Malinovsky, for instance [Khrushchev's future defense minister]. He's in command of the Far Eastern Military District. Why shouldn't we send Malinovsky to North Korea so that, incognito, he could help Kim Il-sung to wage the war more effectively?"

Stalin reacted to my remarks with extreme hostility. I was astonished. Hadn't Stalin given his blessing to Kim Il-sung? Hadn't we given arms to Kim Il-sung? Weren't we on Kim's side? Without our help he wouldn't have stood a chance, but this aid had been in arms only. If we hadn't refused him aid in qualified personnel to assess the distribution of forces and to direct operations, there's no doubt that North Korea would have been victorious. I think if Kim had received just one tank corps, or two at the most, he could have accelerated his advance south and occupied Pusan on the march. The war would have ended then and there. Later, the American press said that if Pusan had been captured, the USA would not have intervened with its armed forces.

As it was, after a long delay, the Americans staged a landing strike of their own. Their troops retook Seoul and moved north, past the 38th parallel—the demarcation line established by the peace treaty after the fall of Japan. The situation had turned catastrophic for North Korea and for Kim Il-sung.

The North Korean air force was armed mostly with MIG-15's, our newest, best, and most maneuverable jet fighters. In the course of the war, the Americans rearmed their air force and introduced a new fighter which was faster and more powerful than ours. Our MIG-15's were simply outclassed and began to suffer defeat. We lost our dominance in the air. The Americans could cut through our air defenses and bomb North Korea with impunity. We weren't able to provide air cover for cities and power stations any more.

While this tragic situation in North Korea was developing and while we were feeling most sorry for Kim Il-sung and the people of the North Korean Republic, Chou En-lai suddenly appeared. I wasn't present during his meeting with Stalin. Stalin was then in the South [in Sochi], and Chou En-lai flew directly there to see him. Afterward, when Stalin returned to Moscow, he said that Chou En-lai had flown to see him on the instructions of Mao Tse-tung. By this time the North Korean army was nearly decimated. Chou asked Stalin whether Chinese troops ought to be moved into North Korean territory in order to block the path of the Americans and South Koreans. At first, Stalin and Chou seemed to conclude that it was fruitless for China to intervene. However, just before Chou En-lai was to return home, one of them—either Chou En-lai on Mao Tse-tung's instructions or else Stalin himself—reopened the whole matter. They then agreed that China should give active support to North Korea. Chinese troops were already stationed along the border. Stalin and Chou believed these
troops could manage the situation completely. They would beat back the American and South Korean troops and save the situation from disaster.

Chou En-lai flew back to Peking. He was Mao Tse-tung's most influential and most brilliant advisor, and Stalin regarded him with respect. We all considered him a bright, flexible, and up-to-date man with whom we could talk sensibly.

China didn't declare war but simply sent volunteers into Korea. These troops were commanded by Peng Te-huai, whom Mao Tse-tung held in the highest esteem. Mao used to say that Peng was the brightest star on the Chinese military horizon.

The fighting started anew. The Chinese succeeded in stopping the advance of the Americans and South Koreans. Pitched battles were fought. In the archives you can find documents in which Peng Te-huai gave his situation reports to Mao Tse-tung. Peng composed lengthy telegrams expounding elaborate battle plans against the Americans. He declared categorically that the enemy would be surrounded and finished off by decisive flanking strikes. The American troops were crushed and the war ended many times in these battle reports which Peng sent to Mao, who then sent them along to Stalin.

Unfortunately, the war wasn't ended quickly at all. The Chinese suffered many huge defeats. We received the news that Mao Tse-tung's son, a general, was killed in an air raid on a command post. So Mao Tse-tung's own son was killed in South Korea! China bore terrible losses because her technology and armaments were considerably inferior to those of the Americans. On both the offensive and the defensive, Chinese tactics depended mostly on sheer manpower.

The war began to draw out. As the two sides dug in, the fighting became bloodier and bloodier. The fronts seemed to be stabilizing. When the North Koreans started to put pressure on the South Koreans, the American troops occupied Pyongyang and pushed the North Koreans back to the border which had been set by the Japanese surrender treaty.

My memories of the Korean War are unavoidably sketchy. I didn't see any of the documents in which the question of military-technical aid to the North Koreans was discussed. But I basically understood our policies. I read all the documents we received from our ambassador. By the time the war started, I had been given my citizenship rights and was put on the government mailing list. While working in the Ukraine I hadn't received any Politbureau mail except on those subjects which related directly to the Ukraine or to me personally. Then, when I was transferred to Moscow, Stalin said that confidential documents could be distributed to me because I hadn't been getting any interoffice mail before. That's how I started to see the battle reports which Mao Tse-tung received from Peng Te-huai and transmitted to Stalin, and that's how I was able to familiarize myself with the situation which was developing in South Korea.