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KOREAN DEVELOPMENTS

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The UN landing at Inchon, by rapidly changing the outlook of the campaign in South Korea, brings appreciably nearer the time when North Korea, as well as the USSR, must implement crucial political and military decisions regarding the ultimate fate of North Korea. With presently available forces, the North Koreans will be unable to hold South Korea; a choice of the four broad alternative courses of action available to the enemy, therefore, depends in the last analysis on the extent to which the USSR is willing to write off North Korean field forces or perhaps North Korea as a whole. These courses of action are: (1) North Korean military action aimed primarily at defending North Korea from invasion by UN forces, possibly combined with North Korean peace proposals; (2) commitment of Chinese Communist or Soviet troops north of the 38th Parallel; (3) an attempt by the USSR itself to settle the conflict diplomatically; or (4) efforts by some third party, perhaps under Soviet influence, to mediate the conflict.

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Military Prospects Successful consolidation of the UN beachhead at Inchon and Seoul would effectively interdict the main route of supply for the estimated 120-130,000 North Korean troops engaged in southeastern Korea. Unless UN forces can be expelled from the Seoul area, organized resistance in the south cannot last long. It is estimated, however, that with the exception of 15-20,000 relatively ineffective security troops, all North Korean combat units have already been committed to the fighting in the southeast. Moreover, it is not believed that Korean reserves now being trained could undertake action against the Inchon beachhead soon enough to prevent the retreat, with heavy losses, of North Korean troops from the southeast. Militarily, then, the most probable course

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of action by North Korean forces, and the one offering the best chance of success, would be the commitment of North Korean reserves to a defensive role and a simultaneous withdrawal of as many combat units as possible over secondary lines of communication from the southeast to defensive positions along the 38th Parallel.

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Soviet Plans Given this probable military development, the USSR must soon: (1) refrain from intervening and rely on the North Korean forces to prevent their own military defeat by UN forces; (2) employ Chinese Communist or Soviet troops in North Korea; or (3) attempt to achieve a diplomatic settlement. The disadvantages to the Soviet Union of the two latter alternatives make the first the most likely Soviet course of action.

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Both the commitment of non-Korean military units and a diplomatic solution negotiated by the Soviet Union itself would force the USSR to disavow its previous stand regarding the Korean question. Since the invasion began, the USSR has made every effort to localize the conflict and to disassociate itself completely from the North Korean action as well as from the UN action. Military action at this time would clearly undermine this position, and even further weaken the current Soviet peace offensive, while Soviet diplomatic action would force the USSR to accept the legality of UN action. The USSR might, however, encourage the North Koreans or some third party to seek a settlement. In either event, the North Korean position would probably be so weak as to leave the terms of settlement largely in the hands of the UN.

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Global War Soviet unwillingness to substantially increase the risk of global war and the Soviet appreciation that the employment of Soviet or Chinese Communist troops in Korea would represent such a risk are even more compelling

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reasons for the USSR to refrain from military intervention, even at the expense of a Communist military defeat in North Korea. Faced with the prospect of UN air and naval harassment of lines of communication in North Korea, the USSR would probably not employ its troops or those of Communist China without providing them with substantial air cover. Inevitable conflict with UN aircraft might lead to a situation which the USSR might consider itself unable to control short of precipitating general war. Even if the USSR issued prior warning of such a move, it could not be assured that UN air forces would refrain from such attacks. Moreover, Soviet or Chinese Communist aid to the North Koreans would leave Chinese and Manchurian supply routes, and possibly industrial installations, open to air attack. The USSR would probably avoid risking damage to this segment of the Communist Far Eastern potential unless it intended to initiate general war in the immediate future.

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Diplomatic Action Any Soviet offer of a negotiated settlement, in addition to requiring the USSR to abandon its position of refusing to accept the legality of the UN's position in Korea, would place the USSR in a very disadvantageous position. Such an offer would have to go beyond a pious call for a "peaceful settlement"; in view of the changed military situation, the USSR no longer has any trump cards. Its bargaining position is so weak that prospects for a settlement favorable to the USSR are extremely limited. The USSR might attempt to improve its bargaining position by threatening to reoccupy North Korea; such a threat, however, would entail the strong risk of being forced to carry it through. An unfavorable settlement in which the USSR had participated or which had been preceded by a military bluff would be more damaging to Soviet prestige than the consequences of a continuation of the present hands-off

policy. The Kremlin, therefore, is more likely to seek to thwart UN efforts through its usual tactics of obstructionism in the UN, coupled with guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, and propaganda within Korea. Although the North Koreans either themselves or through a third party would also be at a disadvantage in seeking a diplomatic solution, if military developments make such an attempt advisable, neither they nor the USSR will be restrained by those considerations of prestige which would deter such action by the USSR alone.

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