Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, E. Bevin, on China’s intervention in Korea, 10 November 1950

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CABINET

CHINESE INTERVENTION IN KOREA

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

[…]

Role of Russia

There is no conclusive evidence of Chinese/Russian coordination of policy, but bearing in mind the Chinese action in allowing Koreans from the Chinese armies to take part in the campaign in Korea from the outset and bearing in mind the consistent similarity between Russian and Chinese publicity about Korea, it is reasonable to assume co-ordination of policy between Moscow and Peking, particularly as this is provided for in the Sino-Soviet Treaty. I doubt whether the Russians conceive it to be in their interests to promote open hostilities between China and the United States of America, because, whatever immediate advantages such a catastrophe might appear to confer upon Russia, I doubt whether it is present Russian policy to precipitate a world war and the Russians (and Chinese) must know that hostilities between America and China might develop into a world war.

13. At the same time, it is in Russian interests to keep Chinese-American hostility alive, and the Russians may be counting on doing this, without running the risks of provoking a world war, by conniving at Chinese actions in Korea and the Far East generally while themselves assuming the role of world peace-makers.

Objectives

14. This analysis – which, I would remind my colleagues, is only tentative – points to certain broad conclusions as bases for our policy: -

(a) mobilisation of the maximum support for United Nations policy in Korea;

(b) preventing an extension of the Korean conflict; and

(c) restraining the Chinese.

15. These lines of policy are not new. On the contrary, they have been the lines followed by His Majesty’s Government since fighting began in Korea. Indeed, the new Resolution before the Security Council is consistent with them. I felt however that Chinese intervention in Korea made it necessary to review the situation afresh and to try to assess Chinese motivations and intentions. Pending further developments I am reasonably well satisfied in my own mind that we have been tackling the problems on the right lines. I hope that my colleagues will agree.

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