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Sergey Radchenko. "Lost Chance for Peace: The 1945 CCP-Kuomintang Peace Talks Revisited." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 19:2 (Spring 2017): 84-114. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00742.

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Review by **Tianyu Zhou**, Korean Peninsula Center at Peking University

By introducing plentiful primary resources and clarifying the mystery concerning Stalin's telegram on the Chongqing Peace Talks, Sergey Radchenko's new article contributes significantly to the current historiography. Radchenko, employing Russian and Chinese documents, re-evaluates the 1945 Chinese Communist Party-Kuomintang Peace Talks and argues that "the scope of the debate needs to be expanded" (113).

Radchenko concludes that peace could have been achieved in 1945 if Chiang Kai-shek, the Generalissimo of the KMT, had accepted CCP Chairman Mao Zedong's "pragmatic" proposal to divide China into "Northern and Southern Dynasties" (101). He argues that the CCP military operation in the Northeast was planned to gain negotiating "capital" to win concessions from the Kuomintang (100). He further maintains that if Chiang had accepted Mao's proposal to "have two governments in China," and if the U.S. had understood the sincerity in Mao's proposal and persuaded Chiang to agree with it, the Chinese Civil War could have been prevented (88). Radchenko argues that Chiang and the U.S. were ultimately responsible for the failed peace in the fall of 1945 (85).

Radchenko also clarifies two telegrams from Moscow to the CCP in August 1945, demonstrating in detail how Soviet leader Joseph Stalin forced Mao to go to Chongqing to negotiate with Chiang, as well as discussing Mao's response. Although Stalin's telegrams pressing Mao to go to Chongqing are well-known to historians, the original Russian and Chinese versions have not yet been found.¹ He argues that the Stalin's so-called first telegram was drafted by Georgi Dimitrov, the former Chairman of the Communist International, on 18 August, with Molotov's approval on the next day, and cabled to the CCP on 20 August.² Radchenko,

¹ Shi Zhe, *Zai Lishi Juren Shenbian- Shizhe Huiyilu* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1991), 308.

² See Georgi Dimitrov and Ivo Banac ed., *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 379. However, the full text of telegram drafted by him has not yet been found.

analyzing the CCP's decisions after 20 August, concludes that Mao rejected the request in this telegram, mainly because it was cabled from Dimitrov rather than from Stalin. In addition, he clarifies the details of Stalin's second telegram, saying that it was sent to the CCP in the name of "the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)," not in a Stalin's name. (89) However, Mao regarded the second telegram as Stalin's and changed his previous attitude, proving that Stalin's second telegram played a decisive role in changing Mao's decision.³

The argument that Mao regarded Northeast China as negotiating "capital" with KMT needs further discussion (99). Available CCP and KMT documents clearly showed that neither party regarded Northeast China as dispensable; Radchenko therefore underestimates the strategic values of the Northeast to the CCP and KMT.

For the CCP, Northeast China was of crucial interest. Considering that the CCP's main forces centered in North China and Shandong Province and that KMT forces mainly dominated in South China, "if the KMT was dominating in Northeast China, the Eighth Route Army would be encircled front and rear."⁴ Thus, Mao, emphasizing the high strategic value of Northeast China in the future struggle with the KMT, further insisted that "Northeast China is an extremely important area...if we hold the Northeast while losing all revolutionary bases in other places, we can say that we still had a firm revolutionary foundation."⁵ This shows that Northeast China was indispensable to the CCP.

Securing Northeast China was a top priority to the KMT as well. Noting the strategic importance of the well-developed agriculture and industry of Northeast China, Chiang made concessions to Soviet Union on the issue of Outer Mongolia in order to secure Northeast China after the war.⁶ He even stressed that "without

³ Radchenko asserts that he received a copy of the second telegram from Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine, while the exact date and full text of the telegram are not clarified.

⁴ Kim Sang Won, "The Chinese Civil War and Sino-North Korea Relations, 1945-50," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 27:1 (June 2014), 92.

⁵ Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi ed., *Mao Zedong Wenji*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), 410-411; Kim Sang Won, "The Chinese Civil War and Sino-North Korea Relations," 92.

⁶ In the 14th memorial meeting of 18 September 1945, Chiang stressed that, "Northeast China has 240 million mu land under cultivation, 200 million mu waiting for cultivation, the vast 600 million mu woodland and 8 billion tonnages of metal and non-ferrous mines," which is "good enough to build up a modern country." *Dagong Bao*, Chongqing, 19 September, 1945, cited from Qin Xiaoyi ed., *Zhonghua Minguo Zhongyao Shiliao Chubian: Dui Kangzhan Shiqi*, vol. 7, Postwar China, no. 1 (Taipei: Zhongguo Guomindang Zhongyang Weiyuanhui Dangshi Weiyuanhui, 1981), 73; Chiang's concessions can be seen in the telegram from Jiang Jieshi to Song Ziwen, the KMT representative, Chongqing, 6 July 1945, cited from Qin Xiaoyi ed., *Zhonghua Minguo Zhongyao Shiliao Chubian- Dui Kangzhan Shiqi: Zhanshi Waijiao*, vol. 2, 593-594.

Northeast China, there would be no North China; without North China, there would be no China.”⁷ The resolute attitude of both the CCP and KMT to secure the Northeast severely weakens Radchenko’s argument.

Furthermore, Radchenko argues that Mao’s proposal to divide China into North and South sections was sincere, “realistic” and “pragmatic” (85). However, Mao’s proposal, I believe, was not only insincere, but unacceptable to KMT as well. First, the issue whether Mao’s proposal was sincere or not must be re-evaluated. When Japan surrendered in August 1945, the geopolitical landscape was not in the CCP’s favor. Along with the United States,⁸ the Soviet Union recognized the KMT regime as the unique legitimate government and recommended that the CCP join the KMT-led coalition government.⁹ Besides, Chinese ‘public opinion,’ tired of the long anti-Japanese war, strongly desired domestic peace and forced the CCP to solve the two parties’ problems peacefully (92). Therefore, Mao, owing to the domestic and foreign pressures, decided to go to Chongqing. This clearly shows that Mao’s trip to Chongqing was not of his own volition. Plus, Mao, in the airplane to Chongqing, indicated that he expected that “the peace talks would not produce any results,” suggesting that the peace talks were doomed to fail from the beginning.¹⁰ The CCP’s proposal can thus be regarded as a CCP ploy in order to buy time and alleviate the pressures at home and abroad, rather than as a sincere, realistic or “pragmatic” proposal, as Radchenko argues.

The KMT also regarded the proposal of dividing China as unacceptable from the beginning, as the CCP expected. As soon as this proposal was raised on the negotiating table in 3 September, Chiang immediately criticized it, saying that “the CCP is so unreasonable” and “the negotiations are impossible to carry on.”¹¹ In sum, it is apparent not only that that the CCP was insincere in its proposal, but that the KMT could not accept Mao’s proposal as well.

While, as noted, the article makes an important contribution to the literature, I believe, on the whole, that Radchenko’s new argument that there was a chance for establishing peace in the CCP-Kuomintang Peace Talks in 1945 needs further and deeper discussion.

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⁷ Chen Xiaowei, *Weishenme Shiqu Dalu: Minguo Wushisannian* (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1982), 248; Kim Sang Won, “The Chinese Civil War and Sino-North Korea Relations,” 92.

⁸ General Order No.1 stated that “the senior Japanese commanders and all ground, sea, air and auxiliary forces within China, (excluding Manchuria), Formosa, and French Indo-China North of 16 degrees North latitude, shall surrender to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek,” United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Volume VII, The Far East, China*, 15 August 1945, 740.

⁹ Wang Tieya ed., *Zhongwai Jiuyuezhang Huibian*, Vol. 3 (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1982), 1327-1340.

¹⁰ Hu Qiaomu, *Hu Qiaomu Huiyi Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2014), 82.

¹¹ Chiang Kai-shek, *Jiang Zhongzheng Riji*, 3 and 21 September 1945, publisher and date unknown.