

# The Echo of the Khabarovsk Trials: The USSR and the Allegation Campaign against the USA of Using Biological Warfare during the Korean War (1950–1953)

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## Abstract

During the Korean War (1950–1953), China and North Korea accused the US of waging bacteriological warfare, including the use of biological weapons developed Japanese war criminals from Unit 731, who had been convicted during the Khabarovsk Trials in 1949. The Soviet Union did not immediately join in the allegation campaign against the Allies, with the Soviet Foreign Ministry initially taking a restrained stance. However, with Moscow's backing and active involvement in international organisations and the media, a powerful propaganda campaign was unleashed against American-led UN troops in Korea, as well as the political leadership of the US. The campaign was markedly political in nature and it involved many prominent individuals, including public figures from Western countries. An extensive action plan was developed, although its implementation was incoherent, which was a reflection of both the lack of evidence and a rapidly changing international environment.

The article demonstrates how the Soviet stance on the use of biological warfare during the Korean War changed and reveals how the extensive campaign was launched amid the Cold War.

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## Keywords

history of health care, workplace health expert committees, disability groups, development

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One of the underexplored episodes in the modern local historiography of the Korean War (1950–1953) is the campaign launched by China, North Korea and the Soviet Union, which accused the US of waging biological warfare against China and North Korea. Most studies do not address this issue (Slavinskiy 1991, Tarasov 1996, Torkunov 2000, Li 2001, Chubak 2001, Popov et al. 2005, Ledovskiy 2005, Vanin 2006). A number of authors write about the use of this type of weapon by American forces with certainty, citing official arguments made by the Soviet Union, North Korea and China in the 1950s (Mezhdunarodnaya nauchnaya komissiya... 1952, Voyna v Koree... 2000, Bakterii kak boevoe oruzhie... 2001, Supotnitskiy 2013). Some Russian publications only address the idea that these alle-

gations against the US were propaganda (Akhalkatsi 1995, Kapitsa 1996, Asmolov 2018). Some media publications claim the allegations are trumped up (Zhirnov 2001, Mlechin 2012).

This point of view dominates the work of American historians (Clews 1964, Styuk 2002, Leitenberg 1998, Weathersby 1998, Crane 2002, Leitenberg 2016), although some writers have backed the allegations against US forces (Endicott and Hagerman 1998, Chaddock 2013). The attempt at examining this campaign from the perspective of the motives of the Chinese authorities deserves attention, including with respect to the extensive anti-epidemic measures subsequently conducted in China (Rogaski 2002). With a few exceptions, Japanese historiography almost does

not examine this issue (Wada 2002, Chosen senso to Nihon... 2006, Hattori 2007, NIDS... 2007).<sup>1</sup> According to researchers, access to Chinese archives is still restricted, although Chinese scholars have made their contribution to the modern historiography of the problem by examining it in the context of social mobilisation (Yang 2004, Chen 2009). This article seeks to shed light on the position of Soviet authorities and to identify the preconditions, the course, key aspects and methods of the campaign of allegations against the US on the use biological warfare during the Korean War in 1950–1953.

The Korean War broke out in the early morning of 25 June 1950 when the North Korean army invaded the Republic of Korea. An emergency UN Security Council meeting was held the same day, where a resolution was passed, identifying North Korea as the aggressor and demanding that North Korea withdraw its forces across the 38th parallel separating the two countries. The UN urged its member states to halt the aggression using their armed forces under the UN flag. The Soviet Union's representative, Y.A. Malik, did not attend the Security Council meeting due to the Soviet Union's boycott in an effort to have Kuomintang's representative removed from the council and include a North Korean representative instead. The Soviet Union was, therefore, unable to veto any decisions made.<sup>2</sup>

UN troops from 16 states, mostly comprising American troops redeployed from Japan, were soon dispatched to the Korean peninsula. The troops were under the overall command of American general D. MacArthur. The military operations immediately ceased from being a conflict between the two states and turned into a proxy war between the US and the Soviet Union. In October, the so-called Chinese volunteers joined the war on the side of North Korea. The Soviet Union provided material support to both the North Korean army and the Chinese. It also sent its military advisers. It is well-known that Soviet pilots battled the American air force over the Korean skies. The operations progressed with mixed success for both sides and ended with an armistice in July 1953. The war was ferocious on both sides. It inflicted significant economic damage on the Korean states and led to enormous human losses, primarily among the civilian population. The US, China and the Soviet Union also paid a price for their involvement. During the war, North Korea and China accused the US of using biological warfare, and these allegations were actively supported by the Soviet Union. Here a reminder of the facts which enable to understand the historical context of the described events is necessary. This primarily pertains to the in-

vestigation and the Khabarovsk Trials held in the Soviet Union in 1949, which established that Japan had developed and tested biological weapons during World War II. Twelve Japanese prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, who were anything but the chief architects and organisers of the monstrous plans, were convicted during the Khabarovsk Trials. The chief culprits, primarily Shirō Ishii, were in hands of the Americans and had been granted immunity from prosecution in exchange for information. The US therefore saved them from liability for their crimes. The Soviet Union made numerous attempts at initiating a new trial, demanding to prosecute not only soldiers, but Emperor Hirohito himself as well. Because the American leadership refused to discuss this matter, the Soviet Union used this circumstance to accuse the US of developing biological weapons and enlisting former Japanese military personnel to that end (Romanova 2015, Romanova and Shulatov 2017). In the period under review, the development of biological weapons was not a crime in terms of international law. These weapons were being developed by many countries, including the Soviet Union and the US. The Geneva Convention of 1925 prohibited their use. This is particularly why this issue was very relevant in the early 1950s and was actively exploited in diplomatic squabbles not only between the two superpowers but their allies as well.

According to K. Weatherby, China instigated the allegations against the US (Weathersby 1998). M. Laitenberg notes that in the first five months of 1951, the Chinese press and radio referred to news stories relating to general Shirō Ishii, the Japanese military program for the development of biological weapons during World War II, work in the US and the Khabarovsk Trials: the US was allegedly preparing to use this type of weapon in the Korean War (Leitenberg 2016).

In May, North Korea joined the Chinese and levelled the allegations officially. On 8 May 1951 the North Korean government sent the UN a letter, signed by the country's foreign minister Pak Hon-yong,<sup>3</sup> expressing "resolute protest against the new monstrous crime committed by the American invaders - the use of biological weapons in the war against the Korean people". What was cited as evidence was the outbreak of smallpox in December 1950 and January 1951 "in some areas 7-8 days after their liberation from American occupation". The letter said that "through the intermediary of the Japanese government", at the "orders of MacArthur, production of biological weapons was rolled out in Japan" and "reports in print media" were even cited, according to which an estimated half a million dollars was spent. The US was also accused of handing over biological weapons to South Korean forces. The conclusion said this "gravest crime" committed by the Americans "will meet blistering condemnation from

<sup>1</sup> One of the few Japanese historians to examine this problem was H. Wada (Wada 2002, p. 359–362).

<sup>2</sup> Y.A. Malik returned on 1 August 1950 and resumed his duties as the next UN Security Council Chair.

<sup>3</sup> Spelt "Пак Хен Ен" (Pak Hon-yong) in soviet documents.

the international community”.<sup>4</sup> The allegations against the US were grave, but there was no “blistering condemnation from the international community”. The Soviet Union and even the part of the “international community” represented by left-wing international organisations controlled by Moscow remained indifferent to the allegations.

On 10 May, the main Soviet newspaper Pravda published a statement issued by the North Korean foreign minister without any commentary. Subsequent reports on the war in Korea, including those filed by the newspaper’s own correspondent in the country, A. Tkachenko, never claimed the use of biological weapons during that period.

Even Soviet foreign minister A.Y. Vyshinsky never capitalised on this issue to denounce the US in his addresses at the UN (Rech 1951a, Rech 1951b). The World Peace Council (WPC) also never responded to reports on the US’ use of the banned weapons. In any case, there is no mention of that fact in the WPC Bureau’s resolution of 10 May 1951,<sup>5</sup> or in the “On Korea” section of the resolution of the Second Session of the WPC held from 1 to 9 November 1951 (Novoe vremya... 1951). Furthermore, a commission of another left-wing organisation – the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF) – was stationed in Korea from 16 to 29 May 1951. As reported in the press, this commission was investigating the atrocities of the Anglo-American invaders. The 21-member commission comprised representatives of women’s organisations from 17 countries. At a press conference held in Pyongyang on 30 May 1951, the commission described horrible devastation it had seen in cities and villages, numerous victims among the civilian population and cited numerous atrocities committed by coalition forces. However nothing was said regarding the use of biological weapons.<sup>6</sup> Archive documents show that the WIDF commission made a decision to distance itself from this issue due to lack of evidence. According to commission member M.D. Ovsyannikova, a document was prepared in English language, accusing American forces of waging biological warfare. However, a decision was made not to publish the document because “it was based on already published information and a few statements made by official persons (doctors). The commission was unable to obtain sufficient factual data proving the American occupiers had used biological weapons (smallpox virus)”.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore the first public allegation by the North Korean government against the US on the use of bi-

ological weapons during the war was not supported by the Soviet Union and international organisations under Soviet influence.

Despite the lack of official response from the Soviet Union, China and North Korea continued to accuse the US of preparing for biological warfare.<sup>8</sup> However, those allegations ended in July 1951 (Leitenberg 1998). Interestingly, the Soviet ambassador to North Korea V.N. Razuvaev sent the Soviet foreign ministry a “Briefing note on the atrocities committed by American forces and Syngman Rhee’s army in Korea”. The note had a section titled “Use of biological weapons”, which claimed that in December 1950, American forces in North Korea “spread smallpox infection among the population in areas they had temporarily occupied” as they retreated”.<sup>9</sup> However, the reports drew a muted response from the foreign ministry. A memo written by the Press Department and the 1st Far Eastern Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed to Deputy Minister A.A. Gromyko said “the note sent by Razuvaev on the atrocities committed by American forces and Syngman Rhee’s army was primarily based on information from the North Korean foreign ministry, which was not published in the Korean press”. This remark seems at least odd, since the fact cited by the ambassador was stated in the above-mentioned letter written by the North Korean government on 8 May, which was published by Pravda. Furthermore, the memo written by foreign ministry officials said “digital information on the atrocities requires further clarification owing to the unsatisfactory nature of record-keeping in respective Korean bodies”. In conclusion, the authors wrote: “Considering the above, we consider the publication of materials from this note unwise. We would recommend the editorial board of the Novoe Vremya magazine to publish a generalised article on the atrocities committed by the Americans and Syngman Rhee’s army in Korea”.<sup>10</sup>

This stance taken by the Soviet foreign ministry probably explains the cessation of the North Korean and Chinese campaign of allegations against the US. Considering the nature of relations between the three countries during this period, and judging from archive documents, the Chinese and North Korean leadership at the very least coordinated their foreign policy with Moscow and followed the latter’s recommendations most of the time.

For instance, on 25 July 1950 the League of Red Cross Societies appealed to the Soviet Red Cross Society and the Red Crescent, which was a member of this organisation, asking for help in establishing contacts with the North Korean Red Cross. As explained in the

<sup>4</sup> Pravda. 1951. 10 May.

<sup>5</sup> Pravda. 1952. 10 May.

<sup>6</sup> Mir dolzhen znat pravdu o zlozeniyakh v Koree [The world must know the truth about atrocities in Korea]. Pravda. 1951. 30 May.

<sup>7</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI). F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1412. L. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Pravda sometimes reprinted them without commentary.

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation (AVPRF). F. 0102. Op. 7. P. 32. D. 64. L. 42.

<sup>10</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 7. P. 32. D. 64. L.47.

telegram, “The League... seeks to provide any possible assistance to the Korean people” but is unable to contact the North Korean society.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after, the International Committee of the Red Cross indicated it wanted to help the civilian population in Korea and another request for mediation was sent to the Soviet Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In August 1950, after incessant requests by the leadership of international organisations, a decision was made in Moscow to send the contents of respective telegrams to the North Korean government, but with recommendations not to respond to the requests. In a note addressed to Stalin, A.A. Gromyko argued for the Soviet foreign ministry’s position with that the International Committee of the Red Cross “had close ties to American intelligence”.<sup>12</sup> In the same month, the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a secret resolution to this end. In the explanatory note to Stalin, A.Y. Vyshinsky pointed out that the “presence of representatives of the IRC<sup>13</sup> in North Korea and the work of the IRC and the League in providing assistance could be exploited by the United States to the detriment of North Korean interests”.<sup>14</sup> In December 1950, clearly as a response, Soviet authorities made the decision, approved by the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party “On setting up a 750-bed hospital of the Soviet Red Cross in North Korea in order to provide free medical care to the Korean public”. Interestingly, the attached note on the need for medical personnel for setting up the hospital lists surgeons, general practitioners, neurologists and a pathologist among the medical experts needed.<sup>15</sup>

As for the International Red Cross (IRC), despite the Soviet leadership’s reluctance to allow its representatives into Korea and a very harsh assessment of this organisation, it was not eager to quarrel with Soviet authorities. The visit to Moscow from 10 to 18 November 1950 by an IRC delegation headed by Chairman Paul Ruegger “in accordance with the decision of the Authorities”<sup>16</sup> serves as confirmation.<sup>17</sup> Ruegger and his deputy were received by A.A. Gromyko. Upon his return to Switzerland, Ruegger sent Stalin a telegram in 1951 giving a high assessment of the meeting in Moscow “in a friendly environment and which was constructive”, and reiterated that the IRC wanted to send a “small mission” to North Korea in order to discuss with the North Korean government the “fate of war victims and prisoners of war”,

as well as issues relating to the “protection of the civilian population”.<sup>18</sup> On the same day he sent a telegram to the Executive Committee of the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the Soviet Union, asking for assistance in obtaining permission from the Soviet government to fly an IRC mission to North Korea via Vladivostok. He backed his request with that mail and telegraph could not guarantee the message would reach its destination. In response, it was decided to: 1) instruct the Red Cross mission in Bern, at the instruction of Stalin, to verbally inform Ruegger that the decision to this matter “falls within the jurisdiction of the North Korean government”, and 2) instruct the Soviet ambassador in North Korea to inform the North Korean government the contents of the response to Ruegger’s telegram.<sup>19</sup>

Needless to say, allowing representatives of any independent international organisation into North Korea, where Soviet military equipment was stationed, military advisers were working and Soviet pilots were participating in combat operations, was not part of the plans of Soviet authorities.

A new phase in the campaign of allegations against the US on the use of biological weapons kicked off in 1952 and soon blew up. This phase was coordinated with Moscow, which at this point had become heavily involved and had mobilised its entire propaganda machine.

On 21 February 1952, Mao Zedong wrote to Stalin, claiming the enemy’s aviation had used biological weapons in January–February 1952. He also accused the US of torturing Chinese and Korean prisoners of war and emphasised the involvement of the Japanese war criminals indicted during the Khabarovsk Trials in 1949 and now under the protection of Washington (Kitayskaya Narodnaya Respublika... 2010, p. 132–134). The developments soon gathered pace.

The following day, 22 February, North Korean foreign minister Pak Hon-yong issued a statement, largely repeating Mao’s letter to Stalin. It was claimed that, despite the protest of 8 May 1951, American forces again used this type of weapon early 1952. According to the minister, this happened twice late January and five times in February. He claimed American war planes “dropped a large number of three types of insects, still unknown in Korea: black fly-like, flea-like and bug-like” at the position of North Korea forces, as well as in the rear. It was claimed that bacteriological tests established that the insects were infected with “bacteria which cause plague, cholera and other epidemic diseases”. It was also claimed that in March 1951, “LCI No. 1091 of the bacteriological department, led by the head of the sanitary department of the command centre of UN troops General James arrived at port Wonsan, af-

<sup>11</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 23a. P. 20. D. 259. L. 7.

<sup>12</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 23a. P. 21. D. 268. L. 2.

<sup>13</sup> International Red Cross. – Authors’ note.

<sup>14</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 23a. P. 21. D. 268. L. 12.

<sup>15</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 23. P. 21. D. 267. L. 11.

<sup>16</sup> i.e. the Politburo. – Authors’ note.

<sup>17</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1026. L. 60.

<sup>18</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1026. L. 55–58.

<sup>19</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1273. L. 2.

ter which at Kodzedo<sup>20</sup> island biological weapons were tested on war prisoners from the Korean People's Army and detachments of the Chinese People's Volunteers". The statement claimed the involvement of Japanese war criminals Shirō Ishii, Wakamatsu Yujiro and Masaji Kitano, "who the Government of the Soviet Union on 1 February 1950 had requested be handed over to a special international tribunal as the initiators of biological warfare". The conclusion issued a strong protest and called on the peoples of the world to "demand the cessation of the brutality of the invaders" and hold the organisers of yet another crime "to severe international liability".<sup>21</sup> In April 1951, General James Van Fleet, who was mentioned in the statement, was replaced by Matthew Ridgway as the commander of the 8th army of the USA and UN troops in Korea, a post he held until the end of the war. North Korea and China personally implicated the American military leadership in the crimes, which was also used a bargaining chip in negotiations relating to prisoners of war and others. According to historians, this tactic irritated American generals. Ridgway, who was also accused of waging biological warfare, referred to the communists as "treacherous savages and people without integrity" (Styuk 2002, p. 454–455).

In reply to Mao's letter on 23 February, Stalin wrote: "In response to the criminal acts of the American imperialists, who have launched biological warfare in Korea, it is necessary that the anti-imperialist camp take serious countermeasures". The Soviet leader also approved of Mao's "plan of action for the Korean and Chinese governments and for the World Peace Council". He also wrote that the "Soviet government will actively support these measures" (Kitayskaya Narodnaya Respublika... 2010, p. 134).

On 24 February, Pravda published a statement issued by the North Korean foreign minister and the Chinese foreign ministry also publicly backed the allegations levelled by North Korea. Head of the Chinese branch of the World Peace Council (WPC) Guo Moruo,<sup>22</sup> wrote to WPC chairman, renowned French physicist, Nobel prize winner and member of the French Communist Party, Jean Frederic Joliot-Curie, on 25 February 1952. On the same day, a top-secret memo signed by Soviet deputy foreign minister A.A. Gromyko and chairman of the Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, V.G. Grigoryan, was sent to Stalin. The memo said that the foreign ministry and the Foreign Policy Commission "think it is wise to support the Chinese committee's request regarding the World Peace Council". To this end, they proposed to

instruct the Soviet ambassador to France A.P. Pavlov to inform the committee chairman that N.S. Tikhonov, A.A. Fadeev and I.G. Erenburg, who were part of the Council's leadership from the Soviet Union, considered it "wise for the World Peace Council to support the statement issued by the Chinese Peace Committee".<sup>23</sup> A draft resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party approving this proposal was attached to the note. A.A. Gromyko soon forwarded the Soviet ambassador in Paris the letter from the Soviet writers addressed to WPC chairman Jean Frederic Joliot-Curie.

Soon after, on 27 February 1952, V.M. Molotov, vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, was presented with a "top-secret" draft of a very broad action plan "in relation to the use of biological weapons by the United States of America in Korea", signed by A.A. Gromyko. It consisted of four sections laying out Soviet active measures in the following areas. To start with, a proposal was made to send the US government a protest note and table a motion at the UN Security Council to address this issue and condemn US actions. The second section laid out measures with respect to Soviet public organisations. The All-Union Central Council of Trade-Unions, Soviet Peace Committee, Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Youth and Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Women were instructed to "issue statements expressing protest". Furthermore, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR were instructed to appeal to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies "with a proposal to issue a protest against the use of biological weapons by the US in Korea". The third section proposed the implementation of corresponding measures through "international democratic civic organisations" virtually controlled by Moscow. Among them were the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the Women's International Democratic Federation and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL). The executive committee of the latter was to ensure that a delegation of this organisation, which had left for Korea, presented the Executive Committee of IADL with the respective report on the use of biological weapons by the US in Korea. The commission had not begun its work at that time since it only arrived in Pyongyang on 1 March 1952.<sup>24</sup> The fourth section tasked print media and radio with giving extensive coverage to this campaign in the Soviet Union. The Radio Committee was to "ensure the broadcasting of all published materials abroad".<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> This is clearly about Geojedo island, where the camp for North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war was located.

<sup>21</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 12. P. 18. D. 16. L. 2-6.

<sup>22</sup> State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). F. 9539. Op. 1. D. 164. L. 107-109.

<sup>23</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1273. L. 21.

<sup>24</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 8. P.378. D. 24. L. 92.

<sup>25</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 22. D. 1273. L. 17-19.

The draft was reviewed by high-ranking party officials and was passed as a resolution by the Central Committee of the Communist Party with one amendment. The following addition was made: “The Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, in conjunction with a number of prominent scientists, must issue a statement condemning the use of biological weapons in Korea by the Americans”.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the approved measures, a plan was laid out with the implementation time set in the first half of March 1952.<sup>27</sup> According to the plan, a Soviet protest note was to be handed to the US government on 6 March 1952. However, no mention of this was ever made. Still, the draft note remains in the archives. It repeated accusations stated in Mao’s letter to Stalin dated 21 February 1952 and Pak Hon-yong’s statement issued on 22 February 1952, including on the use by the American command in Korea of “war criminals Shirō Ishii, Wakamatsu Yujiro and Masaji Kitano, who were convicted during the Khabarovsk Trials”; the request that they be handed over to the court is contained in Soviet notes dated 1 February and 15 December 1950. The note said that the Soviet government would not remain indifferent to the use of biological weapons because “they were close to the border of the Soviet Union and therefore posed a threat to the health and life of the population in the Primorsky Krai of the USSR”.<sup>28</sup>

It is not clear why the note was never delivered. The Soviet political leadership probably decided to limit itself to propaganda methods of waging the campaign this stage. There is a good chance this is because most of the diplomatic work has to be concentrated in Europe. Soviet notes on the so-called German Question and the Katyn massacre were issued in the same period of March 1952.

Soon after, on 8 March 1952, Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai claimed that the north-eastern part of China had also suffered numerous biological attacks by US forces from the end of February 1952.

In response, the US State Department published a press-release drawn by US Secretary of State Dean Acheson on 11 March 1952: Here it is in its entirety: “Despite the categorical denial by the United States government and the UN command, communists continue to claim that biological warfare waged by the UN command caused an epidemic in areas in Korea under the control of the communists. I reiterate that the UN command is not waging any biological warfare in any form. In the interests of clarification of facts by an impartial international body, the United States government, as well as the joint command, would like to

propose that the International Committee of the Red Cross takes measures to conduct an investigation in order to establish: 1) the nature and extent of this epidemic, and 2) the actual cause of the epidemic. In order to uncover the facts which leave no doubt, this investigation must be carried out on both sides of the front line in Korea”.<sup>29</sup>

On the same day, Dean Acheson sent the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross P. Ruegger the respective letter via the American consulate in Geneva. The following day, the IRC placed a proposal before the two warring parties “to create a committee consisting of morally and scientifically independent persons who were highly qualified experts in the field of epidemiology”. The committee was to include experts from Switzerland, as well as two or three Red Cross representatives from Asian countries not involved in the conflict. The authorities had to provide full support to this committee and to the work of the experts.<sup>30</sup> The proposal was forwarded to D. Acheson, Kim Il-sung and the commander of Chinese volunteers Peng Dehuai.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, the Soviet foreign ministry found arguments that would come in handy when justifying North Korea’s official rejection of the proposal. These were the Geneva Conventions of 1929 and 1949 on the protection of war victims. The memo addressed to A.A. Gromyko pointed out that according to these conventions, “parties directly involved in military conflict themselves investigate acts of violation of the provisions of the Convention relating to the rules of warfare. Also, the parties, by mutual agreement, may appeal to neutral states or international organisations (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross) to conduct such an investigation”. It was therefore concluded that “the government of North Korea could reject the proposal of the International Committee of the Red Cross to investigate the use of biological warfare”.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, across the entire Soviet Union a campaign was underway, accusing the US, the UN and the entire global imperialism of a heinous crime - the use of biological weapons in Korea and China. Members of various social groups took part in demonstrations. Damning resolutions were passed, calling to hold “misanthropes who flout elementary rules of universal morals” accountable.<sup>33</sup> The largest of these demonstrations were organised in Moscow with the participation of local prominent scientific and cultural figures.<sup>34</sup>

Soviet newspapers and magazines gave considerable space to articles accusing the US of using biological

<sup>26</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1273. L. 30.

<sup>27</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1273. L. 25–26; (Chaddock 2013, p. 130).

<sup>28</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1273. L. 32–34.

<sup>29</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 27a. P. 71. D. 34. L. 94.

<sup>30</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 27a. P. 71. D. 34. L. 59.

<sup>31</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 8. P. 36. D. 17. L. 28.

<sup>32</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 8. P. 36. D. 17. L. 27.

<sup>33</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 812. L. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Pravda. 1952. 14 March.

weapons in Korea and China. According to M. Leitenberg, from mid-March to mid-April 1952 alone, a quarter of all publications were devoted to this issue (Leitenberg 2016). It should also be noted that information from North Korean and Chinese authorities was used in addresses at demonstrations and in newspaper articles.

It is clear that the Soviet leadership and its allies needed to offer more evidence to support the allegations. An international investigation was needed. The participation of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which was independent of the Soviet Union, in such an investigation was unacceptable. Instead of the IRC, a commission of the IADL – an organisation strongly influenced by the left – was dispatched to Korea. That commission was in North Korea from 4 to 16 March 1952. It comprised 8 representatives of different countries – Austria, Belgium, Brazil, UK, Italy, China, Poland and France. The commission was chaired by Heinrich Brandweiner, an Austrian law professor and a member of the World Peace Council. The commission toured the capital city and some affected provinces, met with witnesses and studied information provided by the officials. The picture of distraction and suffering caused by the war had a very strong impression on members of the commission. With respect to the investigation of the use of biological weapons by the US, as stated in the note sent to the Soviet foreign ministry by the Soviet ambassador to North Korea, members of the commission gathered enormous evidence, but “when it came to issuing an official statement on the matter, Brandweiner and other members of the commission avoided direct implication of the instigators of biological warfare and drew up the statement in terms which raised doubts over the veracity of what was established”. Polish representative S. Vasilkovskaya proposed an alternative draft, but that draft was never approved.<sup>35</sup> After its stay in North Korea, at the decision of the IADL, the commission left for China following public allegations levelled against the US by the Chinese foreign ministry. There, the commission used materials prepared by Chinese experts and drew up a report which was signed in Beijing on 30 March 1952. The report published by Soviet press contained the conclusion that “infected insects were dropped over Korea from American planes” (Doklad komissii... 1952).

The Soviet official position on this matter was first announced on 26 March 1952 when Soviet representative Y.A. Malik addressed a session of the UN Disarmament Commission. He accused the US of developing biological weapons, refusing to ratify the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which it had signed, and of using this banned type of weapon in Korea and China, which he claimed had been confirmed by the investigation conducted by the IADL. In this regard, on behalf of the

Soviet delegation, Y.A. Malik introduced for consideration by the UN Panel “the question of the prohibition of the use of biological weapons and liability for those breaching this ban”. He lambasted Dean Acheson’s proposal to enlist the IRC to investigate allegations against the US, arguing that this organisation could not be objective. He said, “the so-called International Committee of the Red Cross during World War II did not utter a single word in defence of the victims of Hitler’s atrocities committed on occupied territories, and therefore protected Fascist war criminals”. Y.A. Malik also said this was not an international organisation since it consisted only of Swiss citizens.<sup>36</sup>

As expected, the leadership of the International Committee of the Red Cross responded. In his telegram to Y.A. Malik, chairman P. Ruegger, as A.Y. Vyshinsky reported to Stalin, attempted to “challenge” the “statement regarding said committee” on 26 March. Y.A. Malik’s response to P. Ruegger was approved by a secret resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. It completely repeated allegations made earlier by the Soviet representative “in accordance with instructions given to him”.<sup>37</sup>

Also undeserving of any trust, in the eyes of the Soviet leadership, was the World Health Organisation (WHO), which had offered the North Korean government help in tackling epidemics. This offer was made via UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie twice late March 1952. Ambassador V.N. Razuvaev reported to Moscow that “Korean friends thought it was unwise to reply to these telegrams”. However, after receiving a third telegram on 6 April 1952, the North Koreans reached out “for advice, whether it was right to continue to ignore Trygve Lie’s telegrams”. Through the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, it was decided that the “Korean friends” should respond to the Secretary-General and the recommended wording of the detailed response was approved. It stated: “The Korean people cannot count on assistance from the so-called international health organisation because it is well-known that this organisation does not have proper international authority. The Korean people expect from the UN decisive condemnation of the criminal use of biological weapons by the American invaders”.<sup>38</sup>

The Soviet Union’s support for North Korea and China caused a wave of indignation in both the US and the UN. American press published articles refuting the allegations, pointing to the falsified nature of the documentary evidence supporting the use of biological weapons by American forces in Korea and China.<sup>39</sup> The UN Security Council wanted to send a commission to investigate the basis of the allegations.

<sup>35</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 8. P. 37. D. 24. LL. 16; 24.

<sup>36</sup> Pravda. 1952. 28 March.

<sup>37</sup> RGASPI. F. 82. Op. 2. D. 1026. L. 70.

<sup>38</sup> RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 166. D. 856. L. 68–71.

<sup>39</sup> AVPRF. F. 07. Op. 27a. P. 71. D. 35. L. 1–183.

It is clear that during this period Soviet authorities hatched up an alternative plan to create, under the auspices of the WPC, an international commission to investigate the use of biological weapons by the US in Korea and China since the IADL and the WIDF commissions had not categorically condemned the acts of the United States. The proposal to create such a commission was laid out by the chairman of the Chinese People's Peace Committee Guo Moruo in his report titled "On the criminal biological warfare waged by the US", presented at a session of the WPC Bureau in Oslo.<sup>40</sup> On 9 April, the WPC informed the Soviet Peace Committee (SPC) that the Bureau had decided to send to Korea a commission whose "competence and impartiality was undisputed". There would be no unilateral decisions during its creation.<sup>41</sup> It is not inconceivable that this was a WPC initiative the Soviet Union decided to exploit.

This is probably why A.A. Fadeev, chairman of the Union of Soviet Writers, who was also vice-president of the WPC, wrote a letter to Stalin. In the letter, he proposed to instruct the SPC to provide the WPC secretariat in Prague with "completely accurate and verified facts" because the information was often riddled with errors. As an example, he cited reports of "cholera-spreading bugs". He also pointed out that "all too often the time when diseases are detected after the infected insects are spread does not match the possible incubation period of said bacteria". He also noted that "hostile propaganda is exploiting these errors". To rectify the situation, he proposed to set up a special commission under the Soviet committee, which would include an experienced scientist - a bacteriologist, an experienced serviceman, several writers and journalists, including those proficient in Korean and Chinese languages. Furthermore, according to Fadeev, his deputy I.G. Erenburg was to be immediately sent to Prague to assist the WPC secretariat. He argued this would be helpful not only "in terms of rolling out the campaign, but primarily in setting up a World Peace Council commission for investigating the crimes of the American invaders in using biological weapons in Korea and China". He also added that "without our help and participation, the creation of such a commission is fraught with known dangers", since "mistakes could be made in the selection and evaluation of individuals".<sup>42</sup>

At A.A. Fadeev's request, A.G. Erenburg left for Prague in April 1952 in order to join the "commission for the review and publication of materials on the use of biological weapons by the Americans in China and Korea" which had been set up under the WPC secretariat. WPC member A.E. Korneychuk<sup>43</sup> also left for

Prague in order to assist in setting up the international commission. A.A. Fadeev was clearly well-informed about the decision of Soviet authorities to steer WPC operations in the right direction. V.G. Grigoryan's memo to the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party M.A. Suslov dated 6 May 1952 reveals that such a decision was made: "The secretariat of the World Peace Council should, in the near future, ensure the implementation of such major events as the roll-out of an international campaign against biological warfare, the creation of an international commission for the investigation of the use of biological weapons in Korea and China by the American aggressors <...>. As far as we know, the WPC secretariat is not coping well with the task set before it". In order to assist the secretariat, V.G. Grigoryan offered to send two officials from the Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to Prague for two weeks – vice-chairman A.A. Smirnov and department head A.I. Legasov.<sup>44</sup>

Work on the establishment of the international commission commenced. It was clear that this time it had to include experts. It was made up of medical professionals and biologists from Brazil, UK, Italy, the Soviet Union, France and Sweden (6 members in total). The Soviet Union was represented by the vice-president of the Academy of Medical Sciences, renowned microbiologist, who had headed the group of experts at the Khabarovsk Trials in 1949, N.N. Zhukov-Verezhnikov, who was also known as a consistent campaigner against "Morganism-Weismannism" and was actively involved in the campaign to support O.B. Lepeshinskaya's theory and Michurinian biology which was being conducted in the Soviet Union during that period (Soveshchanie po problemam... 1951, Aleksandrov 1993, p. 34, Gaysinovich and Muzrukova 1991).

Before leaving for North Korea, three members of the commission – A. Andreen (Sweden), O. Oliviero (Italy) and J. Malter (France) - visited Moscow and spoke with the Soviet Peace Committee. According to the committee's report sent to the Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, A. Andreen thought it would be wise to invite one of the members of the International Committee of the Red Cross chosen by the WPC to join the commission. She also said that the IADL commission had not been convincing enough and so the report of the new commission required a different, scientific, basis.<sup>45</sup> It was hard not to agree with the second proposal. There were also no objections to the first proposal, as well as the invitation of an IRC representative to join the commission.

Judging by official reports, the commission was in China and North Korea from 23 June to 31 August

<sup>40</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 8. P. 36. D. 17. L. 37.

<sup>41</sup> GARF. F. 9539. Op. 1. D. 164. L. 205–208.

<sup>42</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 812. L. 52–54.

<sup>43</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 812. L. 56.

<sup>44</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 812. L. 63.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 812. L. 69–71.



1952. According to archive sources, N.N. Zhukov-Verezhnikov, whose work was supervised by the “Soviet Peace Committee and the Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party”,<sup>46</sup> for unknown reasons arrived earlier, on 19 June.<sup>47</sup>

At the end of the commission’s work, a report was drawn up and on 31 August Beijing hosted a signing ceremony and a press conference, which was attended by 20 Chinese and 9 foreign correspondents (in order to avoid repetition). The latter represented TASS and Moscow-based Pravda, the Central Telegraphic Agency of Korea, the Vietnamese Information Agency, a Romanian newspaper and communist newspapers Daily Worker (London and New York) and Ce Soir (Paris). A statement written by N.N. Zhukov-Verezhnikov, who could not attend due to illness, was read at the press conference. In particular, he stated: “I think after the work of the International Commission of Scientists, no one should remain in doubt that the United States used biological weapons”. It should be noted that articles on the work of the commission were published in Moscow in September 1952, but the final report was missing among those articles (Materialy o rabote... 1952, p. 5).

According to archive documents, N.N. Zhukov-Verezhnikov did not return home with the commission,

but stayed up to 19 October 1952.<sup>48</sup> In October 1952 he made a request to the Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to send Soviet microbiologists I.A. Rubtsov, V.E. Tifolov and P.A. Petrishchev to China to assist the commission (whose work, as noted already, had officially ended).<sup>49</sup> There is a good chance these three were involved in revising the report. However, we could not find information on the publication of that report.

While the International Commission of Scientists worked in North Korea and China, the active campaign of condemning the US for waging biological warfare in Korea continued in the Soviet Union. In Moscow the foreign ministry prepared to take part at the 7th session of the UN General Assembly, which opened on 14 October 1952 and where, among other things, the issue of biological warfare in Korea and China was on the agenda.

The session continued up to September 1953 and during this time, a crucial event happened in the political life of the Soviet Union: Joseph Stalin died on 5 March. His death also marked the beginning of enormous changes in both domestic and policy of the USSR. To a certain extent, this reflected also on the Soviet stance regarding the issue of allegation campaign, which requires an additional examination.

<sup>46</sup> AVPRF. F. 0102. Op. 8. P. 36. D. 17. L. 35.

<sup>47</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 183. L. 102.

<sup>48</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 183. L. 102.

<sup>49</sup> RGASPI. F. 5. Op. 22. D. 812. L. 273.

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