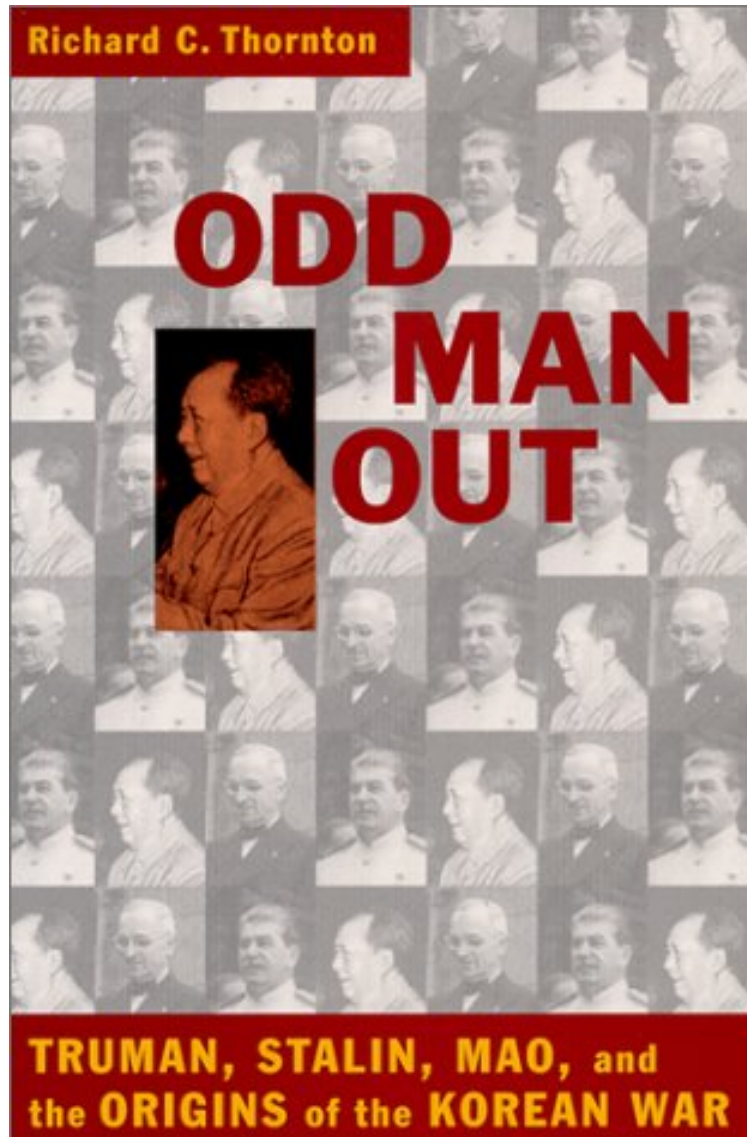


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Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War

Richard C. Thornton

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Richard C. Thornton : Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. So glad I bought this bookBy firecoalmanWhile this title is older

now, and the events it covers obscured by time and right wing propaganda, few books are more timely for what is happening now. This book focuses on a tight but critical time span 1948-50, the sequence of events within which are now hard to reconstruct. And they were poorly reported in that time of limited communications (esp. by the NY Times!). Truman was above all a budgetary conservative, the U.S. had experienced its first large budget deficits in WWII, and he saw it as his mission to rein in spending. The military, then as now, was the big ticket item. We were the only nation with the Magic Weapon and were exultant in our new world leader status. Military planners saw little need for future amphibious capabilities - given our nuclear monopoly who was going to mess with us? Truman sought to rationalize the military for a new nuclear age. Three events in close succession changed the picture completely in the period herein covered. The Soviets, our war allies and until then non-hostile, suddenly shut off Berlin. Then our monitoring plane over Alaska registered a sudden spike in radiation coming from Asia - the Soviets (unannounced) had acquired The Bomb! Then, unanticipated even by Stalin, Chinese Communists swept the former KMT armies off the map in 3 quick campaigns that eliminated a half million KMT soldiers in each swipe. KMT units defected en masse to the Reds. Generalissimo Chang Kai-Shek collected the remnants on the Island of Formosa (the long-Japanese occupied Chinese province of Taiwan). This happened so swiftly that it alarmed even crafty Stalin who tried to put the brakes on his Chinese comrades without success. The book examines in great detail how the State and newly-formed Defense Depts. tried to reorient themselves to these swift-running events. It was doubtful Chang could fend off an invasion of Taiwan, given his performance to date. It was unclear which Communist leader was really in control in China. Parallel to this, was Stalin's plan to keep Mao from making any diplomatic connections to the U.S. His diabolical plan was to set off the Korean War. Too much to explain here- must be read!

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. SOBERING By Eric Rachut This meticulously documented study by a history/political science professor at George Washington University shows that: 1). Mao Tse Tung wanted to invade either South Korea or - preferentially - Formosa, but needed Soviet naval and air power for the latter. The Russians wanted the attack to be in Korea. He opted therefore to support 2). Kim Il Sung, who wanted to invade the South, and was supported by 3). Stalin, whose goal in all of this was to prevent Mao from - like Tito - leaving the Soviet orbit. To accomplish this, he deliberately withdrew the Russian delegate from the UN security council so that a veto of UN support for resistance to the North Korean invasion, when it occurred, could not be cast (that is, the absence of the Soviet delegate was deliberate on the part of the Russians - not a faux pas as is commonly thought). There had been a real possibility that the British would recognize Red China diplomatically, but in this way Stalin ensured a united front of the West against the North Koreans and, more importantly, against Red China. The Red Chinese's only friend would be in Moscow. 4). Truman, on the other hand, realized that the American public would not support the costs of the necessary defense measures against the expansion of Communism without a stark illustration of this aggression. The US knew that the North Korean attack was coming - we had submarines off Vladivostok who watched the ships of armaments leaving and spies on the docks of North Korea who watched them arrive - but left the South Koreans vulnerable - without the arms, air and naval power they desperately requested - so that the attack could not be easily repulsed. In fact, the US planning in autumn, 1949 - the year before the invasion - envisaged a retreat to a Pusan perimeter and then a landing at Inchon! So much for MacArthur's brilliance. Realpolitik!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Grand Conspiracy Theory for the Korean War By Pavel Gribov Thornton presents three main theories to the Korean War: 1. Stalin deliberately prodded North Korea to attack South Korea and designed the invasion to sputter out and incite American intervention only to then illicit a Chinese military response that would prevent any friendly Sino-American relations in the future and subject Mao to Soviet subordination for the near future. 2. Truman ignored the growing possibility of the Korean War and waited to intervene until the North Koreans were on the doorstep of conquering the "free people" of South Korea in order to justify the necessary American military expansion under NSC-68 to counter the USSR and communism. 3. Mao had a grand strategy to have an alliance with the USSR and also gain economic relations with the West, while at the same time annihilating Taiwan and consolidating his power in China. Mao's failure at achieving this strategy was a main reason for China's stagnation until the 1970s. Thornton utilizes a number of primary and secondary sources to intricately prove each theory. He makes a very compelling argument in favor of #1 regarding Stalin. He points out blatant efforts by Stalin to start the war, design it to fail, and then cover it up. I actually believe Thornton on this theory at this time given all the facts he uses to support his claim. On the other hand, Thornton cannot fully prove #2 and even empowers the reader in the conclusion to look into the released intelligence records for evidence that the United States "broke the communist" codes and had prior knowledge of the imminent North Korean invasion and thus outright ignored such signs and allowed the war to happen. Alas, these theories and new perspectives Thornton creates were very interesting and deep. One element that I felt the book lacked was a full discussion of the Korean War. Thornton abruptly ends his discussion during 1950, when the war continued for much longer. It would be interesting to know if any information from later parts of the war back up his claims. Lastly, Thornton uses very pretty rhetoric in his writing style and incorporates a number of unique vocabulary that makes the read interesting. Additionally, Thornton uses many Latin political phrases that the readers needs to know to understand exactly what he is trying to convey. Overall, I would certainly recommend this book to any Cold War enthusiast. You will not view the Korean War or American relations with China the same after reading this piece.

However, remember that Thornton is presenting a grand conspiracy theory.

Based on newly available post-Cold War documentation, this analysis by a Georgetown U. professor of history and international affairs reassesses the American, Soviet, and Chinese decision-making processes culminating in the Korean War and the ensuing New World Order. Mao was the odd man out in th