

The Three Korean Wars

“Introduction to the Korean War” by Allan R. Millett, in *The Journal of Military History* (Oct. 2001), George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, Va. 24450–1600.

If it's thought of at all, the Korean War is seen in the United States chiefly as a “proxy in the cold war conflict.” In fact it was at once a war of postcolonial succession, a war of national liberation, and a struggle involving regional and global powers, Millett declares. Not least, it was a war that cost more than three million lives, a toll exceeded in the 20th century only by the two world wars.

According to Korean folklore, the country has been invaded at least 600 times in the past three millenniums. Its location between Japan and mainland Asia made it a swinging door for passing armies of Chinese, Japanese, Mongols, Manchurians, and, later, Europeans and Americans. Nevertheless, the Kingdom of Choson (“land of the morning calm”) survived from 1392 until 1910, when Korea became a Japanese colony.

The Korean War had its immediate roots in the 1920s, says the author, a military historian at Ohio State University, when rivalry sprang up between two national liberation movements. The “Christian-capitalist modernizers” owed much to the Christian missionaries who had been welcomed in the late 19th century as a counterweight to Japanese influence. After popular protests brought a million Koreans into the streets in 1919, Japan brutally suppressed the movement. That created an opening for the Marxist-Leninists. Conflict between the two groups broke into the open between 1927 and 1931, when the commu-

nists “subverted and betrayed” a popular nationalist association captained by their rivals.

The Korean War really began in 1945, Millett believes, as the two national liberation movements angled for influence in the Soviet and American occupation zones. Two leaders



U.S. troops watch shelling of enemy-held territory, February 1951

emerged: Kim Il-sung in the north and Syngman Rhee in the south. Kim Il-sung persuaded his Chinese and Soviet sponsors to support an invasion to “liberate” the south, which he launched in June 1950. But South Koreans, viewing the assault as yet another Chinese invasion, rallied to Rhee.

“The Korean War everyone knows” was thus a global, regional, and ideological struggle, but also very much a Korean affair. The world has seen similar “mixed” wars—in Algeria, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan—and it will see them again. But it must still learn to see them clearly.

The Atlantic Divide

“Estranged Partners” by Jessica T. Mathews, in *Foreign Policy* (Nov.–Dec. 2001), 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Although European leaders have voiced strong support for the U.S.-led war on terrorism, the show of unity belies what has become a trou-

bled relationship. More telling, says Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is the string of interna-

tional issues on which the United States and Europe have failed to see eye to eye. “In a solid bloc,” Mathews says, “the European Union (EU) approved, and the United States did not, the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the ban on antipersonnel land mines, the biodiversity treaty, and a verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Control Treaty.”

These differences amount to more than the familiar “quarrels among friends” of years past. They stem from changes in Europe since the end of the Cold War and the unwillingness of the United States to compromise in the international arena. During the Cold War, Europe often deferred to the United States, but with its end, the focus on both sides has shifted more to economic matters and other domestic concerns. Europe’s integration into a common market, though halting, has not only increased its global economic clout, but also, says Mathews, has “allowed Europeans to acquire day-to-day experience—and hence a level of comfort—with exactly the kind of painful compromise, frustrating negotiations, and less-than-perfect outcomes” that characterize major international agreements.

The United States, by contrast, has repeatedly taken a “me-first” view on international issues. Take Washington’s reason for opposing the ICC: “that U.S. military personnel might be arbitrarily prosecuted for war crimes.” Such an argument means little to Europeans, who “also regularly send troops abroad on peacekeeping missions.” Further, it undermines the authority for international sanc-

tions that America wants to impose on countries such as Iran, Libya, and Cuba.

The United States increasingly finds “itself on the wrong side of lopsided international judgments.” The breach is widest over environmental issues, such as the regulation of genetically modified foods and the reduction of greenhouse gases. Europe is now taking the lead on brokering many global agreements, such as the 1997 Kyoto climate accords. But it is also using its economic might to increase its global influence in other areas, as evidenced by its diplomatic mission to North Korea last May and its lead role at last fall’s Durban conference on racism. The EU now boasts a gross domestic product roughly equal to that of the United States. It pays a bigger share of the United Nations’ core budget (37 percent versus the United States’ 22 percent). All of this means that Washington no longer can count on “a community of Western democracies and Third World dependents ready to fall into line behind U.S. leadership.”

For its part, concedes Mathews, “Europe needs to outgrow its knee-jerk criticism of the United States for either doing too much or too little and its addiction to feel-good international agreements without regard to their content or actual ability to solve problems.” (No European country has met its Kyoto Protocol commitments.) But “leaders on both sides of the Atlantic will have to adapt if they hope to close the widening gap that not only threatens the United States’ ability to achieve its international aims but also greatly reduces the likelihood that global challenges can be met.”

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Labor’s Pains

“The Six-Year Itch” by David Moberg, in *The Nation* (Sept. 3–10, 2001),
33 Irving Pl., New York, N.Y. 10003.

In 1995, the upstart John Sweeney seized the helm of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) with talk of a new beginning for organized labor. But the labor movement is still in trouble. A decades-long decline in union membership was briefly stemmed in 1999 but

resumed in 2000. Only about nine percent of private-sector workers—and 13.5 percent of the total work force—now carry union cards.

There have been other blows. Al Gore’s loss in the presidential election cost labor a champion, as well as a number of prolabor measures pushed by the Clinton administration. And