



Korea and America 1950–1978

Twenty-five years ago this summer, the guns finally fell silent in Korea, ending a bitter 37-month “limited war” that cost 34,000 American lives and engendered fierce political controversy at home. America’s Korea veterans are now well into middle age, their efforts against the Chinese and North Korean invaders seldom remembered. But they succeeded in repelling Communist aggression, and the shock of that aggression changed modern American attitudes toward national security. The war’s legacy in 1978 includes a big Pentagon budget, a continuing U.S. military commitment to South Korea, and, of late, the unfolding “Koreagate” scandal in Washington. President Carter has vowed to pull out all U.S. ground forces by 1982, while asking Congress for an initial \$800 million in compensatory arms aid for Seoul; both proposals stir debate. Here four historians—Samuel Wells, John Wiltz, Robert Griffith, Alonzo Hamby—look back at the war and what it did to America. Retired diplomat Ralph Clough examines the two Koreas today.



THE LESSONS OF THE WAR

by Samuel F. Wells, Jr.

For most Americans over 40, the bitter conflict on the Korean peninsula from 1950 to 1953 evokes memories and lessons that differ from those of other wars. The Korean War had special, ironic qualities from the start. American intervention had little to do with prior U.S. plans or interests in northeast Asia;

the future development of Korea itself was largely irrelevant to many of Washington's critical war decisions; the clash of conventional armies ended amid secret U.S. threats of atomic holocaust. The accepted "lessons of Korea" have changed with each new generation of statesmen and scholars, but Korea is still recognized as a major turning point in the evolution of America's approach to peace and war in the nuclear age.

During the winter of 1949-50, responding to the recent Communist victory in China and the Soviet detonation of an atomic device several years earlier than predicted, President Harry S. Truman and his principal advisers developed a set of austere, clearly defined international policies.

They assumed that the United States would face a protracted but peaceful war of nerves with the Soviet Union and its satellites. They saw the major dangers to the Republic as those of losing our sense of purpose, allowing our economy to stagnate, and accepting Communist penetration of Western Europe. The administration decided to step up the development of a hydrogen bomb to maintain our lead in technology, and it relied on air power to deter Soviet aggression. Added emphasis was put on the new NATO alliance in order to stem Communist political, not military, challenges in France and Italy.

At the Bottom of the List

One broad review of national security policy produced the now-famous NSC-68 memorandum, which called for vastly increased U.S. military preparedness and more aggressive action to break up the Communist bloc. But Truman refused to approve the extra spending required; he ordered his Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, to keep the defense budget under a low \$13.5 billion ceiling for the 1951 fiscal year.

In East Asia, the Truman administration decided to encour-

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age the tensions already evident between Moscow and the newly victorious Chinese Communists in Peking. Seeing American interests in the Korean peninsula as minimal, Washington decided to avoid any significant support for the one-man regime of Syngman Rhee in the South. The United States had already pulled its troops out of South Korea by the autumn of 1949. Only an advisory group remained behind. With regard to Soviet intentions, Major General W. E. Todd, director of the Joint Intelligence Group of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that in any ranking of Soviet targets for aggression "Korea would be at the bottom of that list. . . ."

The Acheson Speech

To make all this clear to both friends and adversaries, Secretary of State Dean Acheson spelled out the administration's Asian policy before the National Press Club on January 12, 1950. He defined the United States defensive perimeter as running from the Aleutians through American-occupied Japan and the Ryukyu Islands to the Philippines—a line which, significantly, excluded Taiwan, Indochina, and South Korea.

In an often neglected section of his speech, Acheson emphasized that the recent dominance of the Soviet Union in absorbing large sections of the four northern provinces of China was "the single most significant, most important fact, in the relation of any foreign power with Asia."* He then warned: "We must not undertake to deflect from the Russians to ourselves the righteous anger, and the wrath, and the hatred of the Chinese people which must develop. It would be folly to deflect it to ourselves."

With the North Korean invasion of June 25, 1950 (Washington time), the Truman administration quickly reversed itself. The President committed first air power, then United States troops to help defend South Korea. The American decision to intervene rested on certain assumptions. Despite their awareness of Sino-Soviet friction, Truman, Acheson, and other Washington officials believed that Joseph Stalin and the Politburo not only sought world domination but controlled all major initiatives by Communist bloc governments, including China and

* Acheson mentioned Outer Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Manchuria. Outer Mongolia had been Soviet-dominated since 1921 and declared its independence from China in 1945. In Manchuria, Acheson cited the Soviet-administered Far Eastern Railway. (He cited no specifics regarding Soviet behavior in Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia.) At the time Acheson spoke, Sino-Soviet negotiations were underway which resulted in the Russians relinquishing control of the Far Eastern Railway, and in a Soviet commitment to evacuate Port Arthur in Manchuria.

North Korea. Thus, virtually all the American policymakers assumed in June 1950 that the Kremlin had approved and directed the North Korean invasion.

Today, significant evidence from Soviet and North Korean sources indicates that Stalin had endorsed a limited North Korean military push across the 38th Parallel, but had urged that it come not before November 1950. There is good reason to think that Kim Il-sung, North Korea's strong-minded dictator, launched a larger invasion than Stalin authorized and on his own initiative advanced the schedule. But it is now apparent that Truman and his senior advisers, with a Cold War mindset shared by most Americans, did not perceive such possibilities or seek to exploit any potential differences between Moscow and Pyongyang.

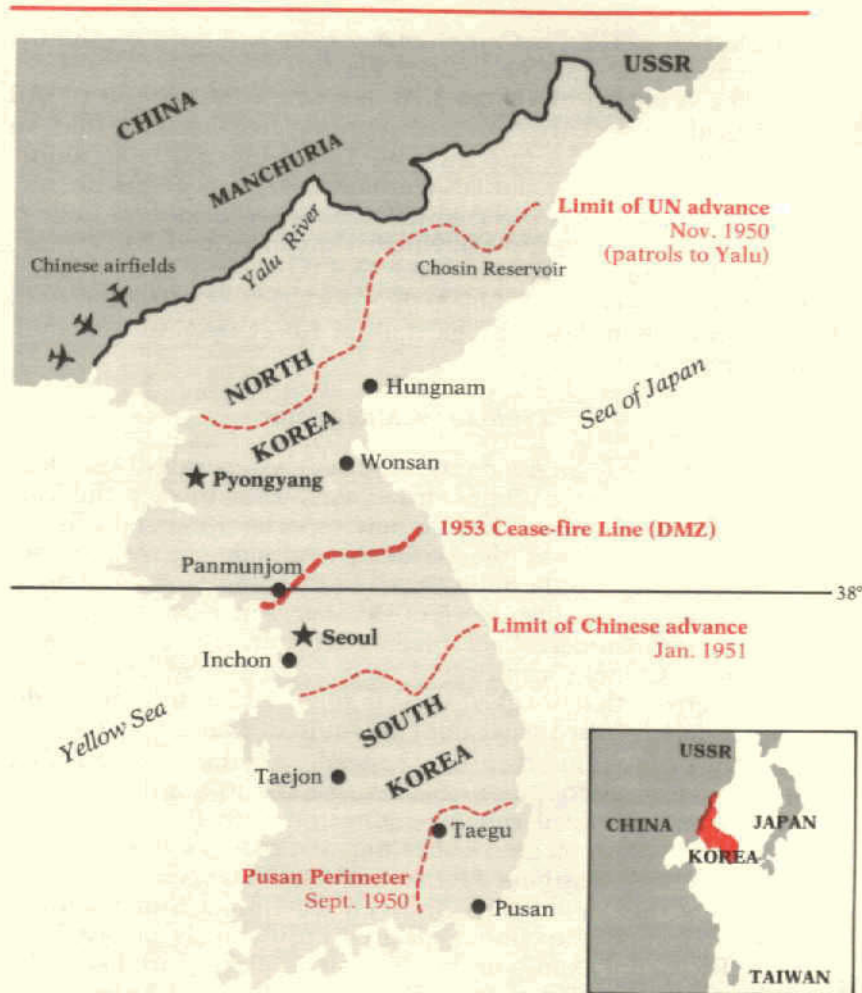
Convinced that the North Korean attack represented a coordinated Communist test of American will, Truman saw little alternative to intervention. In his memoirs, the President recalled his thoughts of how Nazi aggression, unchallenged in the 1930s, had led to World War II. "I felt certain that if South Korea was allowed to fall," he said, "Communist leaders would be emboldened to override nations closer to our own shores." Despite his inappropriate analogy to the Nazis and his simplistic view of the Communist bloc, Truman's instinctive decision to intervene was sound.

Responding quickly during a Soviet absence, the United Nations Security Council endorsed a resolution condemning the North Korean action as "a breach of peace" and on June 27 called upon all UN members to assist Syngman Rhee's Republic of Korea in repelling the invasion.

Turning the Tide

The big question for the United States, given the weak state of its military forces, was how to help. With North Korean troops advancing rapidly down the peninsula, Truman directed General Douglas MacArthur in Tokyo to provide air and naval support to the South on June 27. Two days later, acting without formal congressional authorization and expecting the conflict to be brief, the President ordered American ground forces to join this UN-sponsored "police action."

Under MacArthur's leadership, American troops turned the tide. Starting from a small, hard-pressed defensive perimeter around the port of Pusan, the general executed a classic envelopment of the North Korean forces with a daring amphibious landing at Inchon—near Seoul, the capital—on September 15.



The map of Korea became a familiar newspaper feature in 1950–53 as the battleline shifted—first south toward Pusan with the North Korean invasion, then north as the U.S. Marines landed at Inchon and retook Seoul, then south again as the Chinese Communists intervened to rout the overextended UN forces, which later counterattacked. By late 1951, the front line had stabilized above the 38th Parallel as truce talks began at Panmunjom. Peak U.S. strength: 302,000 men. Fourteen other nations (including Britain, France, Turkey, Ethiopia, and Colombia) sent 40,000 troops to fight under the UN flag (and U.S. command). The war saw the introduction of U.S. jet fighters in combat, the transport helicopter, the rifleman's nylon armored vest, and Koreans to fill out the ranks of U.S. units.

Within two weeks the Communist armies had been decimated and driven from South Korean territory.

The euphoria of victory then led MacArthur into a fateful miscalculation. Disregarding a warning from Peking that an American advance across the 38th Parallel would bring China into the war, the five-star UN commander stretched his instructions from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who set as his military objective "the destruction of the North Korean Armed Forces." To General George C. Marshall, who had become Secretary of Defense on September 21, MacArthur declared: "Unless and until the enemy capitulates, I regard all of Korea open for our military operations."

Truman vs. MacArthur

Against only slight resistance, widely-separated American and South Korean columns drove northward toward the Yalu River during October. Despite new reports of massed Chinese troops poised across the border in Manchuria, MacArthur pushed ahead, and the Joint Chiefs in Washington did not order him to stop. In the last week of October, American troops first encountered Chinese "volunteers." By late November, overwhelming Chinese armies had turned the UN advance into a costly retreat that shocked Washington and led to a major domestic debate over the wisdom of "limited" wars.

The Chinese intervention changed everything. It prevented a UN victory; a costly seesaw struggle led to a military stalemate that stabilized roughly along the 38th Parallel by late 1951.* The common desire of Peking and Moscow to sustain the North Koreans postponed for several years an open Sino-Soviet split. And intense hostility between the United States and the People's Republic of China endured until shortly before President Richard Nixon's dramatic visit to Peking in 1972. The Chinese intervention also led MacArthur, in an effort to restore his military reputation, to challenge both the limited war strategy and the authority of his Commander in Chief. But President Truman, convinced that America's principal danger came in Europe from the Soviet Union, refused to adopt MacArthur's proposals to take the war into Chinese territory. In April 1951, he brusquely fired the great hero of the Pacific war and, in the face of a popular uproar, made it stick.

The Korean War spurred a massive U.S. rearmament effort and a major shift in defense policy. Consistent with its assump-

* See David Douglas Duncan's photo-narrative *This Is War!* (1951) and combat historian S. L. A. Marshall's *The River and the Gauntlet* (1953) and *Pork Chop Hill* (1956).

tions about the war's origins, the Truman administration put the lion's share of its increased defense outlays into programs directed against the Soviet Union. The budget for defense and international affairs climbed from \$17.7 billion in fiscal 1950 to \$52.6 billion in fiscal 1953. The new departures included the development of tactical nuclear weapons, the rushed construction of numerous air bases at home and overseas, the dispatch of four additional Army divisions to Europe, the rearmament of West Germany within an integrated NATO force, expanded military help for other allies, and the inauguration of a more ambitious economic aid program. A new venture into psychological warfare was launched with the creation of the inter-agency Psychological Strategy Board in 1951. Covert operations increased, including the recently disclosed CIA mail surveillance (begun in 1952) and the American-supported coups in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala the following year. Additional U.S. commitments in Asia, aimed at containing China, included a pledge to defend Taiwan and sharply increased military aid to the French fighting Ho Chi Minh in Indochina.

An End to Relaxation

As Americans have had further opportunity to learn in recent years, it is much easier to intervene in a small distant country than to withdraw. After the Chinese indicated (via the Soviets) a willingness to discuss terms, truce talks began in July 1951. But peace did not come easily. The Chinese proved to be as uncompromising at the negotiating table as on the battlefield. Differences arose over the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea, the compulsory repatriation of prisoners, and Syngman Rhee's efforts to prevent the signing of any agreement. As casualties continued to mount, American opinion turned increasingly against this limited war. Truman's popularity plummeted; the Republicans shrewdly chose Dwight D. Eisenhower, the hero of the European war, as their 1952 presidential candidate and ran him on a platform dedicated, in part, to ending the fighting in Korea. Early in his administration Eisenhower indicated the seriousness of his purpose by conveying through the Indian government a message to Peking: Continued deadlock at the truce talks could lead to American use of atomic weapons against China. With this incentive—possibly enhanced by the death of Stalin in March—negotiations at Panmunjom moved to the signing of an armistice in July 1953.

The most significant immediate results of the Korean War were a vast increase in American defenses against the Soviet

Union and a marked improvement in the power and morale of the NATO alliance. American leaders took a number of lessons from the war. Despite the “no more Koreas” consensus in Washington, Congress demonstrated a new willingness to combat Communist influence wherever it appeared. Under the Eisenhower administration, United States security interests were to be maintained by increased use of covert operations, by a “New Look” military establishment with a much smaller Army, and by greater reliance (“More Bang for the Buck”) on the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons within a strategy of Massive Retaliation. Never again were U.S. defenses to be reduced to the low pre-Korea level.

The Korean experience also served to bolster the authority of the President in foreign affairs and to increase the weight of national security arguments in public debate. In dealing with a Communist opponent who disregarded the established rules of international conduct, so the thinking went, the President had to have the authority to respond quickly and in kind to undeclared wars and covert operations. Since the Communists would exploit any weakness and would seldom negotiate in good faith, the United States must remain powerful and should never negotiate except from a position of strength. The MacArthur imbroglio showed that civilian authority must (and could) be maintained over the military. The North Korean attack and the Chinese intervention showed the importance of demonstrating the American will to resist Communist aggression. And most citizens agreed that the United States had to pursue a bipartisan approach to vital questions of national security.

History Misread

By 1960, the policy implications of the Korean War had changed significantly. The outcome came to be viewed as a Cold War victory, and American leaders—including the “defense intellectuals” in academe—concluded that limited war could be successfully pursued by a democracy. Democratic politicians noted that Truman had demonstrated the resolve to meet force with force under adverse circumstances; many believed that any successful future president would have to adopt the same firm posture. Generals Maxwell Taylor and James Gavin persuaded President John F. Kennedy that the United States could avoid political difficulties by training Special Forces units for guerrilla warfare and by devoting greater effort to winning and maintaining popular support at home.

But the energetic leaders of the New Frontier, along with

the press, Congress, and most of the public, ignored the crucial differences between Vietnam and Korea. "Controlled escalation" theories so popular in universities could not be applied successfully in Southeast Asia, for the circumstances were strikingly divergent. The Vietnam War in 1961–65 was not a formal military confrontation launched by an invasion across a recognized border, confined to a peninsula, fought by organized armies, and supported by coherent populations on two clearly distinguishable sides. In Korea, a limited military success was possible. In Vietnam, it was not.



THE KOREAN WAR AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

by John E. Wiltz

In the week before the news flashed around the world that Communist tanks had crashed across the 38th Parallel in Korea, nothing seemed more remote from the minds of the people of the United States than the prospect that within a fortnight tens of thousands of their countrymen might be committed to bloody combat on a rugged peninsula in East Asia.

Brewers were worried about a decline in the consumption of beer, but the national economy in the week of June 18–25, 1950, was nearing the end of its most prosperous six-month period since the Second World War. Indeed, consumers were buying so many automobiles and television sets—largely on credit, a source of concern to Edwin G. Nourse, the former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers—that the food and clothing industries were preparing a campaign to lure people away from auto and TV showrooms by reducing prices. Thomas E. Dewey announced that he would not run for a third term as governor of New York (a decision he would reverse less than three months later); Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R.-Wis.) sought to explain a

payment of \$10,000 received from a prefabricated housing manufacturer for an article on housing he had written in 1948 while serving as vice chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Housing.

For the 33rd President of the Republic, the week before the Communist onslaught in Korea was most satisfying. Beneath a headline proclaiming, "The Sun Shines on Harry Again," *Newsweek* declared: "Just in case there was anyone who had forgotten November 1948, Harry S. Truman proved anew last week that it's always too early to count him out. No matter how bad a beating he's taking, he keeps coming back for more, boring in. And he doesn't seem to care how many of the early rounds he loses. In politics it's the last one that counts." Overcoming the conservative coalition of northern Republicans and southern Democrats on Capitol Hill, the President had secured an extension of rent controls and a displaced persons act, making it possible for additional refugees from communism to enter the country, and he seemed on the verge of winning passage of new social security legislation increasing benefits.

Life After Death

Elsewhere, 51-year-old Gloria Swanson continued to move about the country as an advance agent for her much-publicized "comeback" film, *Sunset Boulevard*, and the Cole Brothers Circus, featuring William Boyd (better known to legions of movie fans as Hopalong Cassidy), was preparing for a five-day appearance at New York's Yankee Stadium. A survey released by the *Christian Herald* disclosed that church membership had soared to an all-time high—81,862,328—and that 54 percent of the populace belonged to churches compared with 20 percent in 1880 and 35 percent in 1900. Finally, *Argosy* magazine reported the results of a poll in which 51 newspaper editors were asked to describe the news their readers would most like to see. Word that the Stalinist dictatorship had collapsed and that war had been permanently abolished, so the editors surmised, were the stories that would most gladden Americans. After that, they thought, Americans would like most to read that scientists had

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KOREA: A CHRONOLOGY

- 1945 U.S. and U.S.S.R. each occupy one half of Korea in accordance with Yalta and Potsdam agreements.
- 1947 *March* Announcement of Truman Doctrine of resistance to Soviet expansionism; Greece and Turkey get substantial U.S. aid. *June* Secretary of State George C. Marshall calls for a European Recovery Program (the "Marshall Plan").
- 1948 *February* Communists take power in Czechoslovakia. *July* Communists' Berlin blockade and U.S. airlift begin. *November* Truman re-elected in upset; the Democrats win both houses of Congress.
- 1949 *April* NATO treaties ratified by Senate. *June* Last U.S. occupation troops withdrawn from Korea.
- 1950 *January* Alger Hiss convicted of perjury in connection with his prewar membership in the Communist Party; Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivers speech omitting Korea from U.S. interests in Asia. *June* North Koreans invade South. *September* Congress, over Truman's veto, passes the McCarran Act requiring registration of Communists and "front organizations"; Inchon landings; rapid UN advance into North Korea. *October* Gen. MacArthur and Truman meet on Wake Island. *November-December* Chinese intervene in Korea; UN forces retreat; U.S. Marines fight through encirclement from Chosin Reservoir to the sea; Truman declares national emergency; Office of Defense Mobilization established.
- 1951 *January* Wage and price controls applied; Sen. Robert A. Taft (R.-Ohio) opens major foreign policy debate with harsh attack on administration policies. *April* Truman fires Gen. MacArthur. Gen. Matthew Ridgway takes command of counterattacking UN forces. *June* Draft extended; age limit lowered to 18½. *July* Truce talks begin.
- 1952 *March* Truman announces he will not run for re-election. *April* President orders government seizure of steel industry to prevent strike, but Supreme Court rules his action unconstitutional. *July* Steel strike ends after 54 days. *October* G.O.P. candidate Dwight Eisenhower says, "I will go to Korea." *November* With 55 percent of vote, Eisenhower elected President over Democrat Adlai Stevenson; G.O.P. also wins narrow congressional majorities.
- 1953 *February* President Eisenhower ends wage and price controls. *July* Armistice signed at Panmunjom.

found a cure for cancer, that Jesus of Nazareth had returned to earth, and that science had proved the existence of life after death.

Sugar and Nylons

“The news hit the United States like lightning out of a clear sky.” So went one report of the initial response of Americans when, on Sunday afternoon, June 25, 1950, broadcasters interrupted regular radio programs—in much the same way as they had done on an epochal Sunday afternoon eight and a half years before—to report the first fragmentary dispatches disclosing that the Communists had invaded South Korea. For tens of millions of Americans whose memories reached back over the previous two decades, the dispatches brought forth visions of doomsday. Clearly the Soviets, who, in the view of most Americans (70 percent according to a Gallup poll taken six months before), were conniving to become “the ruling power of the world,” were behind the North Korean attack. Just as the Japanese and the Italians and the Germans had begun their play for world conquest during the 1930s by armed aggression in Manchuria and Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia, so the Soviets were making their play in Korea.

Most of the citizenry grimly approved when President Truman, enjoying a quiet weekend in Independence, Missouri, rushed back to Washington and over the next few days committed American air and naval units and then Army troops to combat in Korea. Columnists Joseph and Stewart Alsop seemed to catch the popular mood: “The whole momentous meaning of President Truman’s decision to meet force with force in Korea can only be grasped in the light of what would surely have happened if he had decided otherwise. For there can be no doubt that the aggression in Korea was planned as only the first of a whole series of demonstrations of Russian strength and Western weakness, designed to lead to the crumbling of the Western will to resist.”

About the only discordant notes came from Senator Robert A. Taft (R.-Ohio), the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and the American Communist Party. Taft complained that Truman had violated the Constitution by sending American forces into combat without consent of Congress; the *Tribune* charged that the Communist aggression in Korea was an inevitable consequence of a decade of woolly-headed and even treasonous appeasement of the Soviets by the Democrats; and at a rally in Madison Square Garden in New York, some 9,000 Communist Party members

and friends demanded "hands off Korea."

Such broadsides stirred hardly a ripple of interest. The Republic was caught up in a crisis variously called a war, a conflict, and a police action; in the view of 57 percent of the populace, so a Gallup poll revealed, the United States was engaged in the opening round of World War III. In such circumstances a patriotic citizen rallied around the flag—and also looked out for himself.

Fearing that a new period of shortages might be at hand, Americans went on a buying orgy. A special object of their attention was sugar, and sales skyrocketed. A New York housewife who had placed two large orders for sugar in a week explained, "I'm trying to get some before the hoarders buy it all," and in Plainfield, New Jersey, shoppers snatched up six tons of sugar from a single grocery store in four hours. Shortening, canned goods, soaps, and cleaning agents also disappeared from grocery shelves. Scare buyers meanwhile were zeroing in on furniture, bedding, linens, towels, deep freezers, television sets, refrigerators, tires, nylon hosiery, and razor blades; inevitably, scores of thousands of Americans made their way to automobile dealers.

Several department stores took out full-page advertisements in newspapers to appeal to customers to refrain from scare buying. Macy's in New York moralized: "Every decent American should look on hoarding with revulsion! It always plays squarely into the hands of our enemies." But to little avail. Only when fears of an expanded war diminished and hoarders found themselves short of money did the buying binge of 1950 run out of steam.

While scare buyers were making their own special preparations against the possibility that the affair in Korea might escalate into a global crisis, the Truman administration was making preparations of a different sort. Foremost, it was setting in motion a dramatic expansion of the national defense establishment.

Cheering for Taxes

The first action came in the last days of June 1950, at the same time that American air and naval forces were moving into the Korean combat zone. Because the statutory expiration date (June 14, 1950) of the Selective Service Act had already passed, Congress—unanimously in the Senate and with only four dissenting votes in the House of Representatives—extended selective service for a year. Congress also gave the President something he had not requested: the authority to call to active duty,



"Candidate for a back seat" was the title of this July 1950 Christian Science Monitor cartoon by Carmack.

with or without their consent, units or individuals of the National Guard and other reserve components.

According to a Gallup poll taken in late August 1950, while hard-pressed United Nations forces in Korea were defending the Pusan perimeter, two-thirds of the citizens believed the United States had not erred in projecting itself into the Korean conflict. Few young men, however, felt much zeal. Or as Major General Lewis B. Hershey, director of the draft, put it, "Everyone wants out; no one wants in." Reservists and National Guardsmen who received orders to report to active duty and had served in World War II complained that it was unfair that they should be summoned in advance of younger men who never had answered a call to the colors. As for young men who were eligible for the draft, they maneuvered as best they could. Many joined the National Guard in the hope that their units would not be ordered into active service; others made sudden decisions to enroll in colleges or universities. Because most draft boards would not take men out of college, they could thus gain security from the draft at least until the following spring, by which time, they hoped, the police action in Korea would be over.

In July 1950, as the rusty selective service mechanism was beginning to turn and reservists were packing duffel bags, President Truman requested an emergency appropriation of \$10 billion for the national defense establishment and removal of the

statutory limit of 2,005,882 on the manpower of the armed forces; increased military assistance to the NATO allies and "certain other free nations whose security is vital to our own" (including Taiwan and the French in Indochina); authority to establish priorities and allocations to prevent hoarding and nonessential use of critical materials; curbs on consumer credit for commodity-market speculation; increased taxes to pay the defense bill and restrict inflation; authority to impose price controls and rationing; and authority to make federal loans and guarantees when needed to stimulate military production and stockpile strategic materials.

The response to his proposals on Capitol Hill must have startled the man in the Oval Office. Or perhaps they prompted a sly grin. Republicans as well as Democrats stood and cheered when the clerks completed the reading of his message. In the words of one observer, "Republicans were tripping over Democrats in their eagerness to give President Truman what he thought he needed to win in Korea and prepare for the next Korea, whenever or wherever it might turn out to be."

The words and directives of the President and acts of Congress triggered what the news media called "mobilization." Partial mobilization would have been a more precise term. Semantics aside, the United States was girding itself to meet the challenge in Korea—and a much larger challenge if events came to that. What if the conflict in East Asia should come to an early end? It would make no difference. Or so insisted leaders in Washington. The United States, they emphasized, was committed to a permanent build-up of its armed forces to a level of 3.2 million men and women. Never again would the country drop its guard.

A Grim Sophistication

In the end, one may say that except for those dark weeks at the end of 1950, when it appeared that the Chinese might kick UN forces off the Korean peninsula or, worse, that the combat in East Asia might escalate into World War III, the conflict in Korea from 1950 to 1953 was a frustrating but not particularly traumatic interlude in the life of the people of the United States. About 34,000 Americans died in battle during the 37 months of fighting in Korea—less than a fourth as many as died on the nation's streets and highways during the same period.* Thus, the agony of armed conflict directly touched only a fraction of

* About 46,500 Americans died in combat in Vietnam, 1961-73; there were more than 10,000 additional "non-combat" deaths.—ED.

the citizenry. As for the 1.4 million young men who were tapped by their "friends and neighbors" (so stated the "Greetings" that draftees received when ordered to report to active duty) to serve in the armed forces, a majority of them never heard a shot fired in anger. Nor were more than a small percentage marked by psychological or physical scars when they returned to civilian life. On the contrary, the great majority of men who served in the armed forces from 1950 to 1953 slipped with comparative ease back into their former lifestyles. Nearly a fourth of them took advantage of Public Law 550, the Korean GI Bill of Rights enacted in 1952, to attend college or to receive vocational or job training.

Nor were Americans on the home front unsettled, as they would be a decade and a half later during the conflict in Vietnam, by antiwar students' angry demonstrations and charges that the United States was carrying on an inhumane and indefensible military campaign in East Asia. Throughout the Korean conflict, a majority of Americans remained convinced that their cause in East Asia, however frustrating, was just. And the students? Their most raucous activity came during the spring of 1952, when on campuses from Maine to California young men invaded women's residence halls in celebrated "panty raids."

The Korean conflict nonetheless left its marks on American society. On the plus side, America's participation provided a further economic stimulus and, as a consequence, the level of prosperity reached a new plateau. The MacArthur-Truman controversy of 1951 caused Americans to ponder anew the national tradition of civilian ascendancy over the military; the outcome, it is clear in retrospect, was a decided reinforcement of that tradition. Likewise, the MacArthur-Truman controversy compelled citizens to reconsider time-honored ideas about total victory in war. The result, it seems fair to say, was a certain grim sophistication in the United States about the nature and purpose of armed combat in the nuclear era.

EDITOR'S NOTE. Mr. Wiltz's essay and those of Mr. Griffith and Mr. Hamby are adapted from longer analyses in The Korean War: A 25-Year Perspective (The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), an anthology edited by Francis H. Heller for the Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs. (Copyright 1977, The Regents Press of Kansas.)



THE CHILLING EFFECT

by Robert Griffith

The Korean War had an important influence on American politics and culture—less as a force that produced radical departures than as a force that accelerated and heightened processes already underway.

Both the New Deal and World War II unsettled traditional notions about the size and the character of American government. As a result, during the years following World War II American leaders were involved in negotiating a series of arrangements to reconcile competing claims to the government's enormously expanded resources—lower taxes, more social welfare, etc.

The arrangements also involved nonmaterial interests. For example, the impact of World War II and especially the Cold War produced a reordering of the prewar balance between the power of the state and the rights of the people—between the values of national security, on the one hand, and freedom and democracy, on the other. The Korean War influenced the way in which balances were struck in all of these areas.

Since 1947, the Truman administration had been emphasizing the menace of Soviet communism in an attempt to win public support for its foreign policies—the Marshall Plan, NATO, foreign aid. The administration also instituted a tough loyalty-security program, initiated the prosecution of American Communists, and, in general, waved the banner of staunch anti-communism. Conservative critics of the administration took an even more belligerent position, condemning the Democrats for their “softness” on communism both at home and abroad. This conservative attack intensified following the explosion of the Soviet A-bomb, the Communist victory in China, and the arrest of men and women accused of spying for the Soviet Union.*

*Notably Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were executed in 1953.

By early 1950 the targets of such charges included even fervent anti-Communists such as Secretary of State Dean Acheson; Senator Joe McCarthy, the politician who best symbolized and exploited the growing anti-Communist climate, was already a figure of national prominence.

It was in this context that the Internal Security Act of 1950, the so-called McCarran Act, had its origins. A bill first introduced in 1947 by Senator Karl E. Mundt (R.-S.D.) and Representative Richard M. Nixon (R.-Calif.) would have required groups labeled as "Communist political organizations" to register the names of their officers and members with the Attorney General. If the organization's leaders failed to do so, it then would become incumbent on individual members to register. The bill passed the House in 1948, but was bottled up in the Senate.

The Red Menace

Following the outbreak of war in Korea, however, Republicans renewed their drive to get the bill enacted, to prove that they were opposed to communism and to suggest, inferentially, that Truman and the Democrats were not. The response—and I believe this provides some gauge of the reaction within Congress to the Korean War—of Democratic liberals in the Senate was to introduce an alternative bill, a substitute for the Mundt-Nixon bill, authorizing the President to declare a national security emergency which would then allow the Attorney General and the FBI to round up and imprison potential subversives and saboteurs. So drastic was the liberals' bill that one White House aide characterized it as a "concentration camp" measure. The final result was a combination including both the "registration" measure introduced by Mundt and Nixon and the "detention" measure sponsored by Senators Paul H. Douglas (D.-Ill.), Hubert Humphrey (D.-Minn.), and other Democratic liberals. This bill passed both the House and the Senate by large margins, was vetoed by President Truman, and was then passed over his veto. The passage of this measure offers dramatic evidence of the way in which the Korean War heightened the ascendancy of national security values and contributed to the temporary erosion of dis-

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sent in Cold War America.*

Finally, and more generally, the war slowed—if it did not halt entirely—domestic reform on the part of the Truman administration, while further strengthening conservative forces. Truman was forced to abandon the remnants of the Fair Deal and to depend more and more on conservatives, both in Congress, where he was now forced to seek accommodation with the southern Democrats, and within his own administration. The emasculation of the Housing Act of 1949 and the shelving of programs for health care and civil rights bore witness to the impact of the Korean War. President Truman's reform agenda would not reappear until the 1960s under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. By then, it seemed, Democratic liberals, like Alice, were running faster and faster in order to only stand still.



PUBLIC OPINION: KOREA AND VIETNAM

by Alonzo L. Hamby

Public opinion polls are neither self-explanatory nor utterly reliable. However, if intelligently managed and interpreted, they can give us insights into popular attitudes vis-à-vis Korea and Vietnam available to students of few other historical periods.

American involvement in both wars began with about the same high level of popular support, but the approval level for Korea fell off much more quickly and sharply than for Vietnam. As late as May 1970, Gallup still found 36 percent approval, a figure comparable to that for Korea throughout 1951. Conversely, the level of *disapproval* shot up much more rapidly for Korea, peaking after about 15 months, then declining percep-

*The Internal Security Act's "registration" provision was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1965; its "detention" provision was never enforced. However, the act's exclusion of immigrants and visitors to the United States if they had any prior affiliation with totalitarian-minded (i.e., Communist) organizations had a "draconian" effect. See David Caute's *The Great Fear* (Simon & Schuster, 1978), pp. 38–39.—ED.

tibly; the level of disapproval for Vietnam increased fairly steadily, but it took nearly five years (until May 1970) to reach Korea's high point of 56 percent.

Such statistics confound one's impressionistic view that opposition to Vietnam was much more widespread.

Part of the answer, no doubt, is that polls seldom gauge the intensity of opinions. Beyond this truism, however, a study of the differing popular reactions to Korea and Vietnam reveals that, in significant respects, the America of the early 1950s possessed a far different political culture than the America of the middle and late '60s.

The contrasts in the nature of the disapproval of the two wars are enormous. Protest against Korea was spearheaded by a political Right outraged by what it considered administration bungling and a no-win policy. Fifteen years later, protest against Vietnam found its spearhead in a political Left outraged by the alleged moral depravity of American foreign policy. Korean War protesters waved the American flag; Vietnam protesters frequently burned it. Disapproval of Korea was encased in a lifestyle characterized by patriotism and conventional moral behavior; disapproval of Vietnam was inextricably tied to a countercultural revolution that defiantly challenged traditional morality. The contrasts seem overwhelming and leave one startled at the velocity with which history has moved in the middle third of the 20th century.

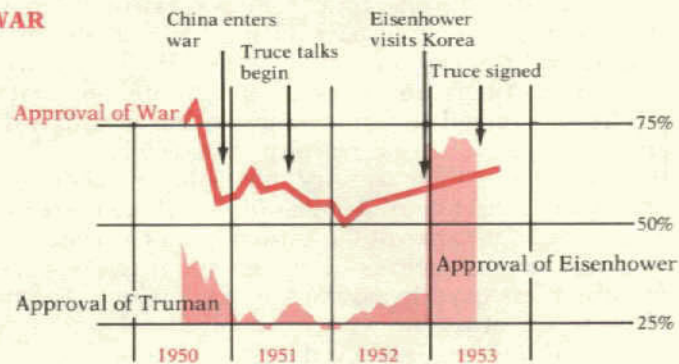
In June 1950, the Cold War was at its peak. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia was less than two and a half years in the past; the Berlin blockade ended a year earlier; the last 12 months had witnessed the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty, the fall of mainland China, detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb, and the American decision to build a hydrogen bomb. Most Americans believed that the grim Stalinist dictatorship was at the head of a worldwide, expansionist totalitarian movement.

Partly as a consequence, the radical Left was in decline. Opponents of the Cold War had failed to present compelling alternatives to the Truman administration's policies. Extending beyond the Communist Party and the various groups of Soviet

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POPULAR SUPPORT FOR TWO WARS AND FOUR PRESIDENTS: ANOTHER VIEW

KOREAN WAR



VIETNAM WAR



The charts above are adapted from John E. Mueller's detailed *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (John Wiley & Sons, 1973). The key Gallup poll query concerning Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon was: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way (the incumbent) is handling his job as President?" The poll question concerning each war was: "Do you think the United States made a mistake" in going into the war? As Mueller notes, answers to this question do not indicate policy preferences (e.g., escalation or de-escalation). In the aggregate, he suggests, Americans reacted "in similar ways" to both Korea and Vietnam. Yet, Mueller finds, Korea seems to have had "an independent additional impact" on Truman's decline in popularity, while the war in Vietnam shows "no such relation" to Johnson's decline.

sympathizers, the collapse of the Left included almost every independent radical movement—the various pacifist organizations, the Socialist Party, Wisconsin Progressives, Minnesota Farmer-Laborites, and others prone to oppose foreign military involvements. The energetic, militant, talented “movement” of the '60s had no counterpart during the Korean era. The dominant liberal force was a “vital center” liberalism willing to accept Soviet-American competition as an unhappy fact of life.

This reflected the immediacy of the World War II experience. As a result of that war, Americans were willing to accept the notion that their country must play a major role in world affairs. For many, that idea was made all the more attractive by American dominance of the United Nations. The memory of the disastrous consequences of appeasement was especially vivid; few observers questioned the Munich analogy. The main theme of protest against the Korean involvement was a demand for more vigorous resistance, not for nonresistance.

Two Morality Plays

By the mid-'60s, the political environment of the Korean War appeared to have been turned inside out. The process of détente with the Soviet Union was already underway, most notably with the 1963 nuclear test ban treaty. Munich, and World War II in general, were dim memories. A New Left was in the process of establishing itself as a vigorous force on the fringes of the American political scene and close to the mainstream of the nation's intellectual life. One of its major themes was a revolt against *Pax Americana*. By contrast, the militant Right had been in decline since Eisenhower had established a bland moderation as the dominant tone of Republicanism. McCarthyism was a bad memory, and charges of “socialism” against liberal Democrats had been relegated to the realm of political comedy. The Goldwater fiasco of 1964 was the last hurrah of traditional right-wing Republicanism. The differences between the political culture of the Korean era and that of the Vietnam era were at least as great as the differences between the two wars.

Yet for all these contrasts, Korea and Vietnam display one essential similarity—each war severely damaged and virtually forced out of office an incumbent president.* Each conflict not only stirred voter resentment over war policy but magnified *other* sources of discontent that otherwise might well have been

* Harry S. Truman announced on March 29, 1952, that he would not be a candidate for re-election; Lyndon B. Johnson did the same on March 31, 1968.

overlooked. A Gallup survey taken a month after the 1952 election illustrates this point. Voters who had cast their ballots for Eisenhower were asked to name the issue that had been most important to them in making their decision:

<i>Issue</i>	<i>All Voters</i>	<i>Normally Republican</i>	<i>Normally Democratic</i>	<i>Independent</i>
Corruption	42%	45%	35%	40%
Korea	24	21	32	23

Each voter category lists corruption first and Korea second. But one may doubt that the relatively minor scandals of the Truman administration would have loomed so large in the absence of the Korean conflict. One may also doubt that the much-publicized flaws in Lyndon Johnson's personality would have seemed so glaring without Vietnam.

Moreover, one theme united both the right-wing protest against Korea and the left-wing protest against Vietnam. That theme was a tendency to conceive of foreign and military issues in terms of a dualistic moralism—a struggle of absolute good against absolute evil. The result was the reduction of complex questions to the level of a hysterical morality play for the most vocal and visible of protesters during each era. To those who set the tone of the feeling against the Korean involvement, international communism was an absolute peril that had to be stamped out without compromise. To the left-wing protesters of the '60s, America had become the world's oppressor, and guerrilla insurgent movements were the hope of humanity.

Intellectuals may argue that limited wars are inevitable in a nuclear world but, whatever the merits of this viewpoint, they must cope with the fact that wars waged by a democratic society require voluntary popular support. It is difficult to argue with the impulse to keep a conflict as small as possible. But the examples of Korea and Vietnam appear to demonstrate that the American people are unlikely to support extended limited wars that promise neither a decisive victory nor a quick end.



THE TWO KOREAS AND WASHINGTON

by Ralph N. Clough

When the artillery finally stopped firing on July 27, 1953, Korea was a devastated land. The mountains and rice paddies were scarred by trenches and shell holes. Entire villages were erased. Seoul and Pyongyang were partly in ruins. And among the people, the trauma had been profound. The South Koreans had sustained 313,000 battle casualties; more than a million civilians had lost their lives; 2.5 million refugees had fled south from North Korea; and the economy was at a standstill. North Korea had suffered massive destruction and even heavier casualties than the South.

For its part, Washington had demonstrated, at considerable cost, that it would not permit people under its protection to be conquered by Soviet protégés. Similarly, the Soviets and Chinese had shown that they would not allow their communist neighbor to be eliminated.

The South Koreans (with U.S. help) and the North Koreans (with Chinese and Soviet aid) set about rebuilding their battered countries. American G.I.s stood guard with South Korean troops along the new 135-mile-long demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas. They faced the Chinese until 1958, when Peking pulled its divisions back across the Yalu River into Manchuria. Three years later, both the Chinese and the Russians signed defense pacts with North Korea, underlining their determination to maintain a communist buffer state along their borders.

Every American president since Truman has reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea. In 1971, however, the improvement of the South Korean Army convinced President Nixon that fewer American troops would suffice to deter an attack; he withdrew one of two U.S. Army divisions stationed in Korea. President Carter has decided that the remaining 14,000-man Second Division can be safely withdrawn by 1982—provided that the South Koreans get additional arms

to compensate for their relative weakness in tanks and artillery, and that U.S. Air Force squadrons in Korea and ships of the nearby Seventh Fleet remain available to back up the South Korean Army.

Today, 25 years after the signing of the armistice, the two Korean states are much stronger politically, economically, and militarily. They confront each other with undiminished hostility. Each of the interested big powers—China, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States—has far more to lose than to gain by renewed conflict in Korea, yet these countries have so far been unable to translate this common interest into agreements to reduce the risk of war. And Americans, concerned about human rights in Korea and Seoul's efforts to influence Congress by improper means, are reassessing the results, favorable and unfavorable, of their 25-year postwar involvement in Korea.

In constructing a political and economic system after the war, South Korea had an initial advantage in the leadership of Syngman Rhee, a fervently nationalist leader widely known to his countrymen, if not universally supported. For the Americans, Rhee, 78 years old in 1953, was a prickly ally who reinforced his nationalist credentials from time to time by clashing with the United States over critical issues. Opposing the 1951–53 armistice negotiations, for example, he declared:

The cease-fire talks are meaningless to me. If necessary, Korea will fight on alone . . . to the finish! No least bit of our national territory should remain in Red hands; not a single Korean live a slave's life under Communist domination.

The South Koreans totally lacked the experience necessary to the functioning of a modern democratic state; during 40 years of Japanese rule they had been denied any training in self-government. Rhee and his supporters established a strong presidential regime, overcoming his political foes who sought a parliamentary system. Rhee's arbitrary actions as president—ranging from rigged voting to the midnight arrest of political opponents—made him many enemies. Finally, in 1960, at the age of 85, he was forced to resign in the wake of student riots in Seoul protesting fraudulent elections. With the blessings of Washington, his opponents installed a parliamentary system. But corruption, favoritism, factionalism, economic stagnation, and almost daily street demonstrations led to a military coup in 1961.

The coup leader, General Park Chung-hee, restored civilian

rule, of sorts, in 1963 by resigning from the army to win election as president. He re-established a strong presidential regime, bringing into his government both civilian administrators and ex-military officers, many of them trained in the United States. The Park government followed a pragmatic course, emphasizing political stability and economic growth. By Third World standards, considerable political freedom was allowed: Park's opponents in the 1967 and 1971 elections received as much as 45 percent of the total vote.

In 1972, however, already disturbed by the manifest strength of his opponent in the 1971 elections, Park was shaken by President Nixon's sudden détente with China and his decision to reduce U.S. forces in Korea. Park declared martial law. He made drastic changes in the Constitution, greatly expanding his own powers. He followed up with emergency decrees aimed at throttling dissent. He justified his actions as required, variously, by the changing international situation, the military threat from the north, and the need for unity in conducting negotiations with North Korea. Those negotiations began in 1971-72. A clandestine campaign to buttress support for South Korea in the U.S. Congress also began at this time. It was the beginning of a somber era in Korea's relations with the United States.*

Yet, under Park's rule, South Korea's economy flourished. In the decade from 1965 to 1976 the real GNP more than tripled.† Exports increased at a spectacular 45 percent annually on the average from 1970 to 1976, despite a temporary slowdown in 1975 caused by the rapid rise in oil prices. Export growth, together with ready access to foreign capital, made possible imports of nearly \$11 billion in industrial equipment from 1965 to 1976. Expansion of the shipbuilding, steel, petrochemical, and fertilizer industries got top priority.

*According to the U.S. State Department, America's postwar economic aid to South Korea in 1953-77 totaled \$5,163 million; military aid was \$6,989 million.

†Economic data are taken from the Central Intelligence Agency study *Korea: The Economic Race Between the North and the South* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Document Expediting Project, ER 78-10008, 1978).

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Per capita income increased year by year; income is now more equitably distributed in South Korea than in many other societies, including the United States. Through government support for agricultural prices and other subsidies, the average income of South Korean farm families has been brought up to the urban level—a rarity in Asia and the rest of the world.*

Expansion of heavy industry in South Korea now has a new goal: to catch up with and surpass the North Korean capacity to produce military equipment, and thus to make Seoul less dependent on outside sources. By 1978, local factories produced machine guns and helicopters, and were beginning to turn out 105 mm and 155 mm field artillery, weapons carriers, anti-aircraft guns, and small naval craft.

Countless Miracles

In the North, unlike Syngman Rhee, Kim Il-sung was not well known at home or abroad when he returned to Pyongyang with Soviet occupation forces after the Japanese defeat in August 1945. But he soon became chairman of the North Korean Communist Party and subsequently purged his rivals one after the other—the homegrown Korean communists, the pro-Peking faction, and the pro-Moscow faction. He came to rely on members of his own family and a small group of senior officials who had been with him as anti-Japanese fighters in Manchuria. And he sought to bolster his legitimacy by encouraging a “cult of personality” approaching deification.

“The respected and beloved leader Comrade Kim Il-sung is a great thinker and theoretician who founded the guiding idea of the revolution of our era,” the official party newspaper *Nodong Shinmun* proclaimed, “a great revolutionary practitioner who has worked countless legendary miracles, a matchless iron-willed brilliant commander who is ever-victorious, and the tenderhearted father of the people who shows warm love for the people of the whole country, embracing them in his broad bosom.”

By the early 1960s, Kim had created, with Chinese and Soviet help, a tightly organized Stalinist society, boasting higher levels of both education and industrialization than South Korea. He ran into economic troubles in the mid-'60s, due partly to the temporary suspension of Soviet economic and military aid. Unlike Park, who had chosen to rely on foreign loans and the rapid expansion of exports to fuel South Korea's economic

*Overall, in constant 1975 dollars, South Korean per capita GNP rose from \$245 in 1965 to \$605 in 1976.

growth, Kim proclaimed the virtues of maximum self-reliance. North Korea's economy lagged behind the South's, in part because Kim focused on the costly expansion of military production. By the mid-'70s, Kim's regime had the capacity to produce complex weapons systems such as tanks and even submarines.

The "Nonaligned" North

In 1971–72, Kim was shocked (like Park Chung-hee) by the willingness of Moscow and Peking to enter into *détente* with the United States. He was discouraged by the failure of his infiltrating commando teams in the late '60s to instigate popular disorder and rebellion in South Korea. He agreed to a dialogue with Park's government. He also relaxed his policy of self-reliance, ordering factories and machinery from Japan and Western Europe in order to offset South Korea's increasing technological advantage. Kim's timing here was unfortunate: Trapped by the sudden rise in world prices of oil and manufactured goods in 1973–75, North Korea ran up debts of \$1.4 billion with non-communist suppliers—six times its annual hard currency exports—and owed some \$1 billion more to communist creditors.

The dialogue between Seoul and Pyongyang, begun amid much hopeful speculation in 1971, soon stalled. North Korea reverted to denouncing the Park Chung-hee government as a puppet of the United States. Kim Il-sung proposed (in vain) separate talks with Washington on the withdrawal of U.S. forces, whose presence he considered the principal obstacle to Korea's unification.

By early 1978, Pyongyang had established diplomatic relations with 92 countries and Seoul with 102; 53 nations, notably excluding the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan,* recognized both Koreas. North Korea had also gained membership in the group of "nonaligned" nations, which rejected South Korea's application. In 1973, South Korea abandoned its opposition to the admission of North Korea to the United Nations; Seoul proposed that both be admitted provisionally, pending reunification, but that proposal was rejected by North Korea on the ground that it would perpetuate Korea's division.

For the immediate future, neither significant progress in the dialogue between the two Koreas nor substantial change in the

*But including Austria, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Portugal.

COMPARATIVE MILITARY STRENGTH



NORTH KOREA

(Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

Population: 16,720,000
 Total Armed Forces: 500,000
 1976 GNP: \$8.9 billion
 1976 Defense spending: \$1 billion (estimated)

Army: 430,000 (2,000 Soviet tanks, mostly T-54/55's, some surface-to-surface missiles)

Navy: 25,000 (10 submarines, former Soviet and Chinese vessels; 7 frigates)

Air Force: 45,000 (630 combat aircraft)

SOUTH KOREA

(Republic of Korea)

Population: 35,200,000
 Total Armed Forces: 635,000
 1975 GNP: \$18.4 billion
 1977 Defense spending: \$1.8 billion

Army: 560,000 (Approx. 1,000 tanks, mostly U.S. M-47/48's; some surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles)

Navy: 25,000 (16 destroyers and destroyer escorts)

Marines: 20,000

Air Force: 30,000 (335 combat aircraft)

Source: *The Military Balance*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1977.

rough balance in international recognition obtained between them seems likely. However, South Korea will probably extend its economic lead over the North, which continues to suffer from a shortage of exports needed to pay off its debts and a consequent inability to secure new Western credits. A recent CIA study estimates that South Korea—with a population twice that of North Korea, a large and diversified export industry, and easy access to foreign loans for the import of capital goods—will have a GNP in the early 1980s nearly three times that of the North.

Forgotten Benefits

In arms production, North Korea may still have an edge, although the South will greatly narrow the gap. If the United States makes available the grants and credits for military hardware proposed by President Carter as compensation for the

withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1981–82, Seoul's ground forces should be well equipped in the 1980s to defeat any attempted invasion from the North.

The benefits to American interests from the successful intervention in 1950–53 and subsequent U.S. support of South Korea are now often taken for granted. Yet these benefits are important. Twenty-five years of peace in northeast Asia, ensured by the presence of U.S. forces and an enlightened U.S. policy toward Tokyo, enabled Japan to become a strong industrialized democracy sharing with the United States and Western Europe an interest in an open world of expanding trade, travel, and intercommunication. Continued U.S. involvement in Korea has helped to sustain Japanese confidence in the U.S. defense commitment to Japan, and to ease pressures on Japan to arm itself with nuclear weapons. That commitment, endorsed since 1972 even by Peking, maintains the equilibrium among the big powers in the western Pacific. A growing benefit to the United States is trade. Already South Korea has become the 13th-largest trading partner of the United States; it is one of a very few nations in the world that buys nearly \$1 billion worth of wheat, corn, and other farm products from the United States every year.

“Koreagate”

Inevitably, U.S. involvement in Korea has also brought problems. At Capitol Hill hearings on human rights in 1974–75, witnesses and members of Congress objected to continued U.S. military aid to an increasingly repressive government. Strains between Washington and Seoul over this issue were intensified the following year by the revelation that businessman Tongsun Park and other Koreans had tried to build support for South Korea through gifts to members of Congress.

For months, the Department of Justice and several congressional committees have been investigating the ramifications of these activities. The “Koreagate” scandals have produced such antipathy on Capitol Hill that Clement Zablocki, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, expressed doubt that the military aid requested for South Korea by the Carter administration could be approved by Congress this year.

American specialists are divided over what to do about the Korean relationship. Edwin O. Reischauer, former Ambassador to Japan, stresses the danger that Park Chung-hee's continued suppression of political and civil rights may provoke disorder and violence. He urges the U.S. government to threaten to withdraw all U.S. forces if conditions in Korea do not improve.

Analysts within the U.S. government, however, without condoning Park's harsh political methods, see little evidence of widespread disaffection that could threaten his position. They see the South Koreans' rising standard of living and their fear of the North as an effective damper on discontent. Others, such as Donald Zagoria, a specialist in Sino-Soviet affairs at Hunter College, are less concerned about South Korea's domestic politics than about the U.S. stake in its security. Zagoria urges top-level reconsideration of Carter's decision to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea. That decision, in his view, undermines Japanese confidence in U.S. steadfastness and creates an unacceptable risk of renewed conflict in Korea.

A Call for Patience

In my view, it is important that we keep our priorities straight. Renewed conflict on the Korean peninsula would be far more damaging than an American failure to persuade or compel the South Korean government to respond fully to American wishes in dealing with "Koreagate" or infringement of human rights. A recent report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by Senator John Glenn (D.-Ohio) and the late Senator Hubert Humphrey urges that congressional decisions on military aid be based on the long-term security interests of the United States, not simply linked to the current bribery scandal. The Glenn-Humphrey report calls for assessment of the military balance in Korea and adequate consultation with both Tokyo and Seoul before each phase of the proposed U.S. troop withdrawal. Moreover, the report suggests, "A major diplomatic offensive should be undertaken to try to bring both Koreas to the negotiating table."

Only Seoul and Pyongyang have the power to moderate their mutual hostility. But the big powers can encourage movement toward peace by making clearer their common opposition to the renewal of conflict in Korea. Continuation of past self-restraint on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union in supplying advanced weapons systems to either Korea is important. Beyond that, vigorous and persistent diplomacy by the United States and Japan is needed. Mobilization of world opinion in support of both the admission of the two Koreas to the United Nations and of recognition of both Seoul and Pyongyang by all the big powers may gradually wear down Pyongyang's opposition to these reasonable propositions. As I see it, the principal weakness of the Carter administration's troop reduction plan is that it involves no comprehensive strategy to improve

the prospects for lasting peace.

Placing higher priority on establishing a stable peace in Korea than on making Park Chung-hee's government more democratic should not mean ignoring the repression of human rights in South Korea. In time, American concern for greater freedom and democracy will have an effect. Unlike the harsh society north of the DMZ, South Korean society remains open to the strong influences of the great industrial democracies, especially the United States and Japan. This openness will bring about the evolution of political and judicial systems in Seoul suited to Korean culture and tradition, but more responsive to the popular will than those systems are today. Patience, not pressure, is the appropriate attitude for Americans.



BACKGROUND BOOKS

KOREA

The final entry in Marine Sergeant Martin Russ's diary is dated September 10, 1953, Ascom City, outside of Seoul. The war in Korea was over; he and his comrades were going home after fighting the Chinese and the cold and the mud for 10 months.

"I dare say," Russ writes in *The Last Parallel: A Marine's War Journal* (Rinehart, 1957; Greenwood reprint, 1973) "that most of the men here are glad they went through the past year, and I dare say that most of them would be at a loss if asked why.

"This morning some of the new replacements landed at Inchon and were brought here. . . . They are less fortunate than we who made the varsity and played games in that enlarged playing field, No Man's Land. But they will get the feel of this sad country with its fine people and its awesome mountains."

A problem for most American readers is that few books convey the "feel" of Korea or of the U.S. experience there. The Korean War produced two or three novels but nothing to compare to those from World War I or II, or even, lately, from Vietnam. Russ, a St. Lawrence College dropout who joined the Marines in 1952, provides the best available equivalent of the fictional treatment given to earlier wars by the Ernest Hemingways and the James Joneses.

Korea's history did not, of course, begin with the U.S. entry into the 1950-53 war, although that period undoubtedly marks the beginning of many Americans' recognition of the Koreans as a separate people.

The strategic location of the Korean peninsula meant that from the

beginning its inhabitants were often subjugated by outsiders, especially, for centuries, by invaders from the Chinese hinterland. The Chinese ruler Ch'i Tzu in 1122 B.C. subdued Korea's "Nine Barbarian Tribes" and found them "a fierce and ungovernable people," according to Canadian missionary historian James Scarth Gale (1863-1937).

Gale's *History of the Korean People*, first published in the *Korea Mission Field* magazine, 1924-26, and incorporated into Richard Rutt's biography, *James Scarth Gale and his History of the Korean People* (Univ. of Washington, 1972), reads like a romantic epic, with frequent references to what was happening in Europe at the time when Korean courtiers were composing lyric poetry and Korean warriors were fighting the wars that Gale chronicles, century by century. He describes the unification of the kingdoms of Korea in the 7th century and the turbulent period of Mongolian domination in the 13th and 14th centuries when "refugees from all parts of China made their terror-stricken way to Korea." In time Mongol gave way to Ming and Ming to Manchu overlordship. All this while Korea was developing its own distinctive culture.

The first Christian missionary did not arrive until 1836. But by 1866 half the world—Russians, French, British, Americans, Germans—seemed intent on forcing its way into a still closed Korea. During the latter years of the 19th century many foreigners did come in. War broke out between China and Japan—with Japan vic-

torious—and pro-Japanese and anti-Japanese factions emerged within Korea's ruling family. Then in 1895 the anti-Japanese Queen Min was assassinated, and the King and Crown Prince, hidden in sedan chairs, fled from the palace to the Russian legation, where they resided for a year. In 1904 the Russo-Japanese War began. It ended with the Russians' defeat and eclipse in the Far East, followed by the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 and a period of severe repression of the Korean people.

A good picture of the customs that developed in Korea over the centuries is given by Yale anthropologist Cornelius Osgood in **The Koreans and Their Culture** (Ronald Press, 1951). Osgood describes Buddhism and Confucianism as they have evolved and are practiced in 20th-century Korea, and the country's distinctive forms of social organization, its painting, pottery, printing, music, and literature—all Chinese-influenced but clearly Korean.

"It is important to remember," Osgood writes, "that the Koreans speak a language as different from Chinese as is French and that the people still show conspicuous contrasts in temperament, being no more like their neighbors in this respect than the Irish are like the typical Englishman."

Best of the studies of the 1950–53 Korean conflict is David Rees's **Korea: The Limited War** (St. Martin's, 1964, cloth; Penguin, 1970, paper). Out of print since 1976 but still available in libraries, it covers both the U.S. politics and the allied military actions that shaped the progress and outcome of the war.

Rees's prose is not pedantic. (Witness his description of the allies' first recapture of Seoul: "Surrounded by hills blazing with napalm and huge

benevolently smiling posters of Stalin and Kim Il-sung, the Stars and Stripes floated over the shattered fifth city of Asia.") The political vulnerability of the Truman administration as the war went on, he writes, reflected the American public's "vast discontent with containment of the Communists." Yet, "rarely in history," Rees concludes, "has a great power sacrificed so much for so little material gain as the United States would do in defending . . . Korea."

The dramatic events in Washington and Korea during the first week of the Communist invasion are reconstructed in Glenn D. Paige's **The Korean Decision, June 24–30, 1950** (Free Press, 1968, cloth & paper).

Veterans of this era provide valuable insights in Paige's volume and in their own books. These include President Truman's **Memoirs, Vol. Two: Years of Trial and Hope** (Doubleday, 1958); General Douglas MacArthur's **Reminiscences** (McGraw-Hill, 1964); Dwight D. Eisenhower's **The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953–1956** (Doubleday, 1963); General Matthew W. Ridgway's **The Korean War: How We Met the Challenge; How All-Out Asian War Was Averted; Why MacArthur Was Dismissed; Why Today's War Objectives Must Be Limited** (Doubleday, 1967); and other recollections by diplomats Dean Acheson, George F. Kennan, and John W. Allison, and by Army Chief of Staff J. Lawton Collins.

The best of the official military histories are those done by the Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History. These include Roy E. Appleman's **South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, June–November 1950** (1961); Walter G. Hermes' **Truce Tent and Fighting Front** (1966); and James F. Schnabel's **Policy and Direction: The**

First Year (1972).

The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953 by Robert Frank Futrell (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1961) describes the failure of "Operation Strangle" to block enemy supplies, the bombing of the Yalu bridges, and the destruction of North Korea's irrigation dikes, almost at war's end.

Two books that assess the role of Korea in American global thinking are Joyce and Gabriel Kolko's revisionist **The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954** (Harper, 1972, cloth; Pathfinder Press, paper) and Bernard Brodie's **War and Politics** (Macmillan, 1973, cloth & paper). In both books, Korea is one of several subjects discussed.

The Kolkos give it 100 of 716 pages. They probe the antecedents of the June 25, 1950 attack, including both Syngman Rhee's and General MacArthur's roles and intentions at this time and later when the Chinese entered the war. In the Kolkos' view, the symbolic importance of Korea to U.S. policies in Europe determined the reactions of Truman and the State Department throughout the war.

Brodie argues that the constitutional issue involved in Truman's decision to bypass congressional approval of his commitment of troops to help South Korea failed to become a key political question only because of the swiftness of events during the critical first year of the war. By the time the increasingly unpopular American involvement had come to be regarded as "Truman's War," armistice negotiations had begun.

The view from Peking is analyzed by Allen S. Whiting in **China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision To Enter the Korean War** (Macmillan, 1960; Stanford reissue, 1968). This RAND study explores the motivations for China's surprise late 1950 intervention, which was at first cautious and limited. Factors included China's fear of U.S. intentions and its wish to promote Communist revolutions in Asia.

In general, the period since the Korean War ended has not been broadly treated in books suited to general readership. Recent specialized collections are **The Two Koreas in East Asian Affairs**, essays edited by William J. Barnds (New York Univ., 1976), and **The Future of the Korean Peninsula**, papers from a conference on Korea and the major powers edited by Young C. Kim and Abraham M. Halpern (Holt, Praeger Special Studies, 1977).

One broader account that does cover the postwar period in readable fashion is Gregory Henderson's overall examination of the Korean political character from its beginnings in the traditional culture 2,000 years before Christ to the mid-1960s. In **Korea: The Politics of the Vortex** (Harvard, 1968), he sums up the situation a decade ago: "If South Koreans lack the cohesiveness and loyalties of previous attachments, they also lack the traditionalism, the resistance to change, the nostalgia that the world of class and feudalism brings. Korean society is an unusually open one."

No major study has yet been done on the less open South Korean society of the 1970s.

EDITOR'S NOTE. Ralph Clough and Samuel F. Wells provided advice on this selection of background reading. Additional recommendations were made by Donald P. Gregg, who served as special assistant to the U.S. Ambassador in Seoul, 1973-75.