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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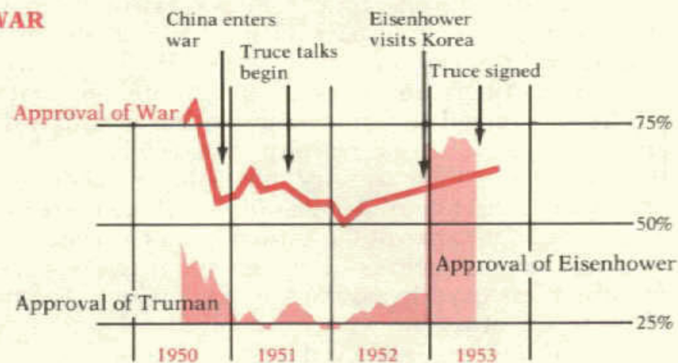
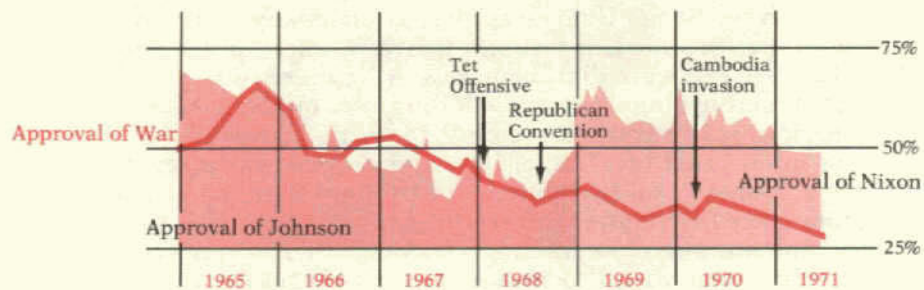
POPULAR SUPPORT FOR TWO WARS AND FOUR PRESIDENTS: ANOTHER VIEW

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:

Issue	*All Voters*	*Normally Republican*	*Normally Democratic*	*Independent*
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.