

**THE JUNE 25, 1950,
NORTH KOREAN INVASION OF SOUTH KOREA**

The Rest of the Story

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*The June 25, 1950, North Korean Invasion of South Korea
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*To the South Koreans, civilian and military alike,
who took the brunt of the June 25, 1950, North Korean
invasion, and to the American soldiers and Marines who
successfully landed at Inchon and broke out of the Pusan Perimeter.*

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Introduction

Presenting the questions:

- Why, sixty-four years after the 1950 North Korean attack on South Korea, is it important to identify the reason for, and consequences of, that invasion?
- What machinations by Stalin, Mao, Kim, and Truman morphed the invasion into a costly United Nations, but mostly American, response?
- What is “the rest of the story?”

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INTRODUCTION

It may seem odd, or at least boring, to revisit in 2014 the 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea, some 64 years after the event.

But it's not.

Because a major consequence of that invasion loudly reverberates today.

The North Korean invasion morphed into a United Nations, mostly American, military response.

After quickly being pushed south by the Communists from the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950 to the furthest southeastern point in South Korea, Eighth Army's breakout from the Pusan Perimeter together with MacArthur's brilliant landing at Inchon trapped and nearly destroyed the North Korean army.

The order to MacArthur by the U.N. and United States Joint Chiefs of Staff to cross the 38th parallel and advance to the North Korea-Chinese border at the Yalu River, posed serious military and geopolitical questions for Mao Tse-tung and his mainland Communist regime. And for the North Koreans. And the Soviets.

The story of why and how the Chinese intervened in the Korean War in the fall and winter of 1950 is for another day, but intervene they did. Massively, and from their perspective to great effect.

With some help from what was left of the North Korean army after Pusan and Inchon, the Chinese Communists fought the United Nations/United States to a standstill, with the armistice line after three years of bloodshed standing virtually at the 38th parallel where the war had begun.

The North Koreans and Chinese cost the United States alone over forty-thousand dead, wounded, captured, or missing. *And they achieved for Communist China the mantle of most powerful army in Asia. Geopolitically, the Chinese had bloodied the nose of the world's only superpower.*

In the intervening years, the initial Chinese Communist ragtag 1950 army of mostly illiterate peasants was instrumental in creating modern China, a nation of fearsome size and enormous strength.

China's client state, today's nuclear-armed, despotic, and unpredictable North Korea, born from the ashes of the war, threatens not only its immediate neighbors but the rest of the world.

The conventional story of the North Korean invasion of South Korea is that the Communist regime sought to unify the peninsula under the domination of dictator Kim Il-sung as part of the worldwide spread of communism. That's true—but only as far as it

goes. There is much more to the story, part of which is little known—a part that speaks ill of America’s leaders of that time, and explains in the name of what so many awful consequences have flowed. As I will explain later, much of the gratitude for “the rest of the story” goes to Professor Richard C. Thornton and his profoundly important and informative book *Odd Man Out, Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*.

It began on June 25, 1950, when as T.R. Fehrenbach has written: “*Manzai! Senior [North Korean] Colonel Lee Hak Ku said, and, eyes gleaming, his staff repeated it. It was 4:00 a.m., Sunday, 25 June 1950. The world, whether it would ever admit it or not, was at war.*”¹

The seeds of that war, had been planted many decades before.

1. WORLD WAR II

The genesis of the Korean War lies in the distant histories of the peninsula's neighbors, Russia and China.

Czarist Russia and centuries of earlier Russian rulers sought to dominate, or at least not be threatened by, populations across their borders.²

So, too, in modern times did Josef Stalin and Mao Tse-tung believe in the necessity for buffer zones protecting their countries' borders. That perceived need of the two Communist leaders—with China's pre-1949 Nationalist government's complicating presence in the mix—was at the core of modern Sino-Soviet relations.

Thus, to understand the Korean War it is necessary to begin with the period close to the end of World War II, about five years before the June 25, 1950, North Korean invasion of South Korea.

During February 4–11, 1945, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt met in Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula to settle post-war affairs.

The end of the war in Europe was finally in sight. When it ended, the allies would face the horrific prospect of a land invasion of the Japanese home islands. It was estimated that despite the ceaseless, devastating bombing the Japanese mainland had endured by February 1945, with much more to come, the enemy would still possess some 5,000 kamikaze aircraft and perhaps as many as two million ground troops—let alone countless more likely fanatical civilians.

There was more: American planners feared that after the allies conquered the Japanese main island, they would still have to engage hundreds of thousands of diehard troops in Chinese Manchuria,³ portending a long, bloody campaign there as well.

Because the American high command was operating on the untested—and, it was later learned, erroneous—assumption that the allies would need Soviet help to defeat the Japanese in Manchuria, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Douglas MacArthur, then Commander in Chief Far East Command, were impatient for the U.S.S.R. to declare war on Japan.⁴ They wanted the Soviet Union actively engaged in the war against Japan, even though in February 1945 General MacArthur predicted that the Soviet Communists would eventually seize Manchuria, Korea, and perhaps even North China.⁵

Earlier, in the European war, the Soviet Union had confronted some two hundred German divisions in savage fighting on the eastern front. For that reason—and surely to gain leverage over, and obtain post-war concessions from, Roosevelt and Churchill—Stalin had remained cannily neutral about when, or even if, the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan.

At Yalta, however, Stalin finally made an agreement with Roosevelt and Churchill to settle questions relating to the post-war Far East. But the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan was contingent on that agreement, the purpose of which would be to legitimize the U.S.S.R.'s expansion in Asia.⁶ A few months after Germany's surrender, the Soviet Union would finally enter the war against Japan.

One provision of the three-party agreement was that Soviet dominance in Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic⁷) would be preserved. Another was that Russia's territorial losses to Japan in their 1904 war would be restored. "In addition to validating various Soviet claims against Japan itself, Yalta gave Moscow extraterritorial rights in China and prescribed the conclusion of a treaty of alliance between Moscow and the Nationalist government [of Chiang Kai-shek]"⁸

Specifically, in return for declaring war on Japan the Soviets would receive half of Sakhalin Island, the Kurile Islands, and recognition of the Soviets' interests in Manchuria.⁹ Mongolia would be detached from Chinese control (without consulting the Nationalist Chinese Government).¹⁰

The Yalta Accords relating to Asia, let alone those affecting Europe, were a coup for Stalin. Finally realizing the goals of Czarist Russia, Stalin was able to promote the interests of dominant nations at the expense of the less powerful, carve out spheres of influence and, probably most important to him, substantially enlarge the Russians' long-desired buffer area outside the borders of the U.S.S.R..¹¹

As we shall see, Stalin's main concerns and maneuvers at Yalta continued into the next decade and explain much about his central, albeit less-than-obvious, role in the North Korean invasion.

By the time the Yalta Conference was over, Stalin had received game-changing concessions from the ill, war-weary Roosevelt (who would die within months) and the tired, pragmatic Churchill (who would soon be voted out of office by British ingrates)—all in return for agreeing to participate belatedly in what would amount to a virtual non-participation in the war against Japan.¹²

Like Chiang Kai-shek, General Douglas MacArthur, viceroy in Tokyo, was not present at Yalta even though important military, political, economic, and geographic decisions affecting his far-reaching Pacific Command and post-war Asia were being made by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin.

When in April 1945 Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, the architect of America's war against the Axis Powers was replaced by his vice president, Harry S. Truman.

Despite his modest beginnings, Truman was well read in history and literature.¹³ As a World War II captain of artillery, he fought in two 1918 French battles. He had held political office in Missouri, and later made a name for himself in the U.S. Senate.

Regrettably, in the three months between Truman's inauguration as vice president on January 20, 1945, and FDR's death on April 12, 1945, the new president had not been made privy by the FDR clique to much of Roosevelt's war strategy or its already-decided, inevitably consequential, Yalta-driven aftermath.

On May 2, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally.

That momentous event did not assuage Stalin's long-standing fear of Japan, even though the Land of the Rising Sun was about to lose the Pacific war.

Indeed, because of his concerns about a resurgent Japan, from late June to early August 1945 Stalin negotiated with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese for a treaty of friendship and alliance. Stalin's idea was to bottle up Japan from all points of the compass.

In July 1945 Churchill and Stalin met in Potsdam, Germany, this time with Truman instead of Roosevelt. Again, even though the war in Europe had ended, leaving the many problems of Asia still to be dealt with, Neither Chiang nor MacArthur were present. As at the Yalta Conference, the politicians were in charge.

One of the lesser issues at the Potsdam Conference was Korea. It was understood that given the agreement at Yalta for the Soviet Union to take the Japanese surrender somewhere in the north of the Korean Peninsula and the United States in the south, there would have to be a boundary line drawn somewhere. General Marshall instructed a member of the U.S. military delegation to be ready to send American troops to Korea.¹⁴ Notwithstanding Marshall's instructions, nothing more happened concerning Korea during the rest of the conference, which ended on July 26, 1945.

Immediately after the Potsdam Conference, President Truman authorized the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan.

On August 6, 1945, Hiroshima was first.

Two days later, the Soviet Union finally declared war on Japan—after the war in Asia had *de facto* ended.

The second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.

The next day the Japanese offered to surrender unconditionally. The offer included their garrisons in Manchuria and on the entire Korean Peninsula.

The Japanese unconditional surrender, however, still did nothing to assuage Stalin's continuing, near-paranoid fears about a potentially dangerous post-World War II resurgent Japan.

Accordingly, on August 14, 1945, the Communist Soviet Union and Chiang Kai-shek's non-Communist Nationalist China signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance—"a

formal partnership” so as to “render impossible the repetition of aggression and violation of the peace by Japan.”¹⁵ Strange bedfellows, indeed—at least for the moment.

Among the many issues the Japanese unconditional surrender in mid-August 1945 had raised for the United States and the USSR was the immediate need for a demarcation line in Korea, especially due to the proximity of the Soviet Army in Manchuria, north of and contiguous to the Korean Peninsula.

Late in August, it was agreed by the Americans and Soviets that the Japanese surrender south of the 38th Parallel would be taken by the United States and north of it by the Red Army.¹⁶

As a result of the 38th Parallel dividing line, Soviet troops would be securely anchored not only in Chinese Manchuria, but also in the industrialized northern half of the Korean Peninsula.

This arbitrary but strategically important division of Korea at the 38th Parallel handed Stalin a trump card he would play a few years later in his Machiavellian game against North Korea’s Kim Il-sung, China’s Mao Zedong, and President Harry Truman.

By August 26, 1945, the Red Army had reached the 38th Parallel. Korea was now *de facto* two countries, one under the domination of the Red Army in the north and the other occupied in the south by a smattering of U.S. troops.

Lest one jump to the unwarranted conclusion that by dividing Korea the United States had gratuitously gifted the North to the Soviet Union (or China), it’s important to recognize that the Red Army was already on the ground in Korea, having rolled through Manchuria with lightning speed. In contrast, the nearest American ground forces were far away, in the Philippine Islands and on the island of Okinawa. It is generally accepted that if no demarcation line had been agreed on, Stalin could have easily occupied all of Korea without anyone’s permission.

On September 2, 1945, the Japanese formally surrendered unconditionally. Additional American occupation troops quickly landed at Inchon, on Korea’s west coast, and a week later Lt. Gen. John R. Hodge accepted the Japanese surrender south of the 38th Parallel.

The Chinese civil war, which by then had been waged for over a decade, showed no signs of abating, let alone ending. Stalin, however, had just signed a treaty with the Nationalists and it was in the Soviet dictator’s interest to keep Mao’s Communist revolution in check.

Stalin’s distrust of Mao, which in a few years would surface more obviously in connection with the Korean War, was nothing new. The Soviet dictator considered Mao a “soft Marxist” who could not be relied on, and could even become anti-Marxist and anti-Soviet.¹⁷

Indeed, when in 1941 the Soviet Union was on the edge of collapse from the onslaught of the German army and Stalin feared a Japanese attack on the Soviet Far East where he would have to commit much-needed troops who were fighting on the Eastern Front, he had implored Mao to fight the Japanese more aggressively so the Russians would have to worry about them less. Mao didn't oblige Stalin because, for the Chinese Communists, Chiang Kai-shek was more of an enemy than were the Japanese.¹⁸

In 1945 Mao appeared to many observers as actually warming up to the United States. For example, more than once during World War II Stalin attempted to have Mao remove American representatives from Communist-controlled areas, but the Chinese leader failed to oblige.¹⁹

Everything considered, it's not surprising that Stalin did not inform Comrade Mao of the Soviet Union's Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with his enemy, Chiang's non-Communist Nationalists, or even of the U.S.S.R.'s imminent entry into the war against Japan. Stalin was concerned about a rapid buildup of Chinese Communist strength in Manchuria, which might imperil the conclusion of the Soviet's treaty with the non-Communist Chinese Nationalists and thus jeopardize the U.S.S.R.'s Yalta-recognized "special rights" in China. Stalin's aim all along was to make Manchuria part of the Soviet security belt—in effect, the U.S.S.R.'s buffer zone in the Far East.

Notwithstanding this goal, playing both sides of the street Stalin did make a major contribution to Mao's military forces. For example, when the Japanese surrendered in Manchuria, the Soviets captured huge amounts of equipment, including not just small arms but also tanks and heavy artillery. Estimates were that the war materiel could arm some 600,000 of Mao's Chinese Communist fighters. That's to whom the Soviet Army delivered it. We can only imagine how much of the small arms found their way into North Korea five years later when the Chinese intervened in the Korean War. That some of it did is beyond question. As United Nations forces would learn the hard way some five years later.

2.

FROM THE END OF ONE WAR TO THE EVE OF ANOTHER

A year after the Japanese surrender, the U.S. Department of State decided that notwithstanding the existence of a hardcore Communist regime a scant twenty-five miles to the north, South Korea would have to fend for itself.²⁰

In September 1947 the United States, with about a division's worth of occupation forces in South Korea, handed off to the newly founded United Nations Organization the problem of Korean independence and reunification.

At the same time, as part of the U.S. withdrawal from South Korea the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the divided country had little strategic value, and that keeping some 45,000 occupation troops there was unwarranted, especially given America's self-chosen military obligations in Europe.²¹ Indeed, MacArthur biographer William Manchester characterized Washington's attitude toward South Korea—by military luminaries such as Eisenhower, Leahy, Nimitz, and Spaatz—as “almost contemptuous” and added that that “[i]n envisioning the Pacific as ‘an Anglo-Saxon lake,’ even MacArthur excluded Korea”²²

The record from at least 1943 to late 1947 could not be clearer. Politically and militarily, the U.S. government had little or no interest in the Korean peninsula, even though during that period a fierce civil war was raging in nearby China, bordering Korea in the north, with the likely winner the Chinese Communists.

In November 1947—in an American-sponsored resolution which even then was not worth the paper it was written on—the United Nations General Assembly called for reunification of Korea, with one democratic government for the entire country. The neophyte international body would supervise national elections.²³ The Soviets, of course, objected, knowing full well what they and their North Korean vassals had in store for South Korea.

In January 1948 the Soviets refused to allow the United Nations into North Korea to administer countrywide elections. In a timid response the next month, the Joint Chiefs of Staff once again washed their hands of Korea, recommending that all American troops be removed from the south—even though the chiefs acknowledged that cutting and running would sooner or later lead to Soviet domination of Korea by the Kim Il-sung Communist regime.

In April 1948, the American hands-off-Korea policy was made even more explicit. A formal National Security Council paper, NSC-8, approved by President Truman, expressly stated that the security of South Korea would have to be in the hands of the South Koreans themselves. Even worse than the United States sending Kim Il-sung that open invitation for his army to invade South Korea in pursuance of his own idea of reunification, Truman assured the Communist dictator that if he invaded South Korea the United States would not consider that a cause for war.²⁴ With U.S. foreign policy

giving North Korea free rein to invade South Korea, it was no coincidence that within months the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) was formally activated.

On August 15, 1948—the North Koreans never having allowed free elections above the 38th Parallel—the government of South Korea was formally installed in Seoul, assuming responsibility for administering the new half-nation. The American occupation was over. Before the Korean War ended five years later, countless combatants and civilians would die, billions would be squandered, and the world would become a very different place.

Withdrawal of American troops began a month later, in September 1948.

On September 8, 1948, the Communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea adopted a "constitution" and the next day claimed jurisdiction over the entire peninsula.²⁵ Kim Il-sung had earlier stated openly that the Communists would reunify Korea in their own way, when they were ready—and under Communist domination.

Lt. Col. Roy E. Appleman has observed that within three years of Japan's surrender of South Korea to the United States, two hostile governments existed on the peninsula, one a Communist dictatorship, the other nominally a fledgling democracy. The North's patron was the Soviet Union. The South had no patron. Certainly not the far-distant United States of America and the impotent United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea.²⁶

The United States diplomatically recognized the Republic of Korea, South Korea, on January 1, 1949.

Soon after the United States recognized the Republic of Korea, General MacArthur informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "ROK [Republic of Korea] armed forces *could not turn back an invasion from the North*, that the U.S. *should not commit troops in case of such an invasion*, and that the U.S. should *remove all of its combat forces* [from South Korea] *as soon as possible*."²⁷

Note that MacArthur was not talking about an invasion by the powerful Soviet Union. Nor even by Chinese Communist troops. Even facing what was then erroneously believed to be a rag-tag North Korean army, MacArthur was unequivocally opposed to committing American troops on the Korean Peninsula.

As if to underscore his point, three months later, on March 1, 1949, MacArthur told a *New York Times* reporter that America's "defensive positions against Asiatic aggression used to be based on the west coast of the American continent. The Pacific was looked upon as the avenue of possible enemy approach. Now . . . our line of defense runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. *It starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu Archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska.*"²⁸

Note that MacArthur did not mention either Formosa (now called Taiwan) or South Korea as being within the U.S. defensive perimeter, just as U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson would not include them the following year.

To further underscore America's disinterest in South Korea, also in March 1949 President Truman approved withdrawal of the last American occupation troops stationed there, a regiment of the U.S. Seventh Infantry Division.

After the Seventh Infantry departed, the United States would no longer have any military presence in South Korea—except for some 500 advisors (Korea Military Assistance Group, KMAG)—until the Korean War began fifteen months later.

Significantly, when MacArthur withdrew the Army's 7th Infantry's regiment he acknowledged that any American military forces left anywhere in continental Asia could be trapped.²⁹ Not just in South Korea. Anywhere in continental Asia.

It was plain at that time that General MacArthur's Far East Command wanted nothing to do with South Korea. *Any notion that Douglas MacArthur expected or desired to fight anyone in Korea at any time for any reason is flatly contradicted by the general's consistently unambiguous statement, which reflected precisely the then-policy of the U.S. government.* MacArthur's position on Korea was militarily obedient to presidential, State and Defense Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and congressional policy. Hardly anyone was interested in South Korea. At least then.

As a corollary to U.S. policy and the withdrawal of American occupation forces from South Korea, in June 1949 the Department of State, washing its hands of the pesky Korean problem, suggested that if the North invaded the South the United States should pass the problem off to the United Nations.³⁰ This was another official reiteration that Korea was not a concern of the United States.

Maybe it wasn't, but on June 19, 1949, the State Department's John Foster Dulles told the Korean Legislature in Seoul that if Korea was attacked, the United States *would* defend. This apparent reversal in Washington's position on Korea generally, and on South Korea in particular, made MacArthur wonder exactly what the American policy in Asia was.³¹

As later events proved, the Far East commander was right to wonder.

By June 29, 1949, all American occupation forces had departed South Korea, leaving only the KMAG advisors behind. A few days later, 500 officers and enlisted men under the command of Brigadier General W. Lynn Roberts were officially the only military left in South Korea.

That summer all responsibility for Korea was deliberately shifted away from the military Far East Command in Tokyo to the civilian Department of State in Washington. The diplomats and bureaucrats were then in charge of South Korea. The American ambassador to Seoul, civilian John J. Muccio, knew little or nothing about

military affairs. KMAG, which did, was placed under Ambassador Muccio's control. That left General Roberts in a reduced role simply as military advisor to Ambassador Muccio, the South Korean president, and the Republic of Korea Army.³² Roberts had become an American general who commanded no American troops.

This major shift in the on-the-ground military responsibility for South Korea from the military to the politicians and bureaucrats is extremely important because of its relationship to the coming June 25, 1950, North Korean invasion.

In sum, as of the summer of 1949—*a full year before the North Korean invasion of South Korea*—even though General Douglas MacArthur was Supreme Commander Allied Powers and Commander in Chief Far East, *he had no civilian or military responsibilities for South Korea*. Not even over the American KMAG troops who served under the civilian ambassador and thus ultimately under the civilian diplomats and bureaucrats at the U.S. State Department in Washington. The official history of KMAG is very clear that MacArthur's responsibility was limited to the logistical support of KMAG only "to the water line of Korea and to the emergency evacuation of U.S. personnel from the country if the need arose."³³

Professor D. Clayton James has observed that as to Roberts's and KMAG's military and intelligence responsibility for Korea after June 1950, such as it was, they didn't know much about the North Korean People's Army capabilities. Yet that did not inhibit Roberts from ignorantly or dishonestly predicting that a North Korean attack would be easily repulsed by the South Korean armed forces.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Whatever Roberts's motive was for puffing up the capabilities of the ROK Army, and no matter how false the rosy picture he painted, his deception worked.

General Roberts and Ambassador Muccio had created Potemkin tours of South Korea for VIPs and journalists, showing them a staged ROK Army that in reality did not exist—much like General Patton's fake Britain-based phantom First U.S. Army Group in World War II, which had been designed to mislead the Germans about where the Allied cross-channel invasion would take place. As a result, U.S. senators, writers, journalists, public officials, and others loudly sang the praises of the Roberts-Muccio ghost army that lacked adequately trained manpower and possessed virtually no equipment.

Even if the Roberts-Muccio deceit had been true, the indisputable fact was that neither the American KMAG advisors in Korea nor the ROK Army soldiers were under the command of General MacArthur or any other military unit. KMAG was "commanded" by a civilian State Department "advisor," the ROKs by combat-untested, ill-equipped South Koreans.

As William Manchester has written, "The Dai Ichi's [MacArthur's Tokyo headquarters building] Korea file was closed."³⁴

3. **WRITING OFF KOREA**

The Korea file may have been closed as far as MacArthur's Far East Command was concerned, but on the Korean Peninsula there were increasing tensions, even mounting border clashes.

While the Americans were pulling out of South Korea, Kim Il-sung was in Moscow importuning Stalin to allow the Korean Communist to attack South Korea. At that time, Stalin granted permission for only a counterattack if South Korea attacked first. As we shall see, Stalin had his own game plan.

It needs to be reiterated that U.S. interests on the Korean Peninsula were at that time controlled not even by the Pentagon, let alone by General MacArthur in Tokyo as Far East commander, but instead by the Washington civilian diplomats and bureaucrats in the Department of State. Indeed, MacArthur would later remind a committee of the U.S. Senate that his Far East Command's only responsibility to Americans in South Korea was to provide them food and clothing. *The record is clear that MacArthur had nothing whatever to do with the policies, the administration, or the command responsibilities in Korea until the war broke out on June 25, 1950.*³⁵ The civilians were in charge, and we will soon see what they wrought.

A profoundly important consequence of the Supreme Commander Allied Powers/Commander in Chief Far East being completely out of the Korea loop was that MacArthur's Far East Command in Tokyo had *no official intelligence or order of battle responsibilities for North Korea*. That command had virtually no knowledge of what was happening in North Korea.

In January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made ill-fated, reiterative remarks (without providing a printed text to the media), at the National Press Club in Washington. Just as NSC-8 (the National Security Council paper approved by Truman), Truman, the Joint Chiefs, and MacArthur had done previously, Acheson precisely defined the Asian perimeter which the United States would defend. *He pointedly omitted South Korea and Formosa*. If the North Koreans attacked, the South Koreans would have to fend for themselves until the United Nations got around to passing some resolutions or perhaps mustering some troops.

Acheson's defense line ran from the Aleutian Islands off Alaska down to Japan, then to Okinawa and associated Ryukyu Islands, and on to the Philippines.

Had Dean Acheson, American diplomat extraordinaire, gone off the reservation by extending an open invitation to the covetous Soviet Union to allow its North Korean proxy to gobble up South Korea, or its Chinese stand-in to seize Formosa? And if so, why did he? The Ryukyus and the Philippines, which were within Acheson's defined defense perimeter, were islands, considerably more difficult to supply and defend than South Korea, a peninsula with lengthy coastlines jutting out from the Asian mainland and not

far from Japan. Was there something else going on which, at the time, no one but Truman and Acheson, and perhaps a few trusted others, was aware of?

Not at all. Acheson was merely reiterating the oft-stated policy of the political and military leadership of the U.S. government.

In fact, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff themselves—Bradley, Collins, Vandenberg, and Sherman—visited General MacArthur’s Far East Command in late January and early February 1950, according to JCS Chairman General Omar Bradley, all of them agreed about what was to be done, *and not done*, in the Far East. Bradley wrote that the conferees were in nearly full agreement on most specific Far East matters. “*We shared the view that Korea was still of little strategic interest and that in the event of ‘trouble,’ the ROK Army could handle North Korea.*”³⁶

Note that there was a faintly implicit recognition that there might be “trouble,” but it wouldn’t be the United States’ problem.

But even as the United States was excluding South Korea from America’s defense perimeter, the military situation on the peninsula was deteriorating rapidly.

Ever since the South Korean government had been installed in the summer of 1948 and recognized diplomatically by the United States on January 1, 1949, the North Korean Communists had been fomenting disturbances and conducting guerilla operations in the south. The guerillas even threatened the United Nations, which became concerned about a cross-border attack by the North Koreans. According to Lt. Col. Appleman, during March 1950, “there were rumors of an impending invasion of South Korea and, in one week alone, 3–10 March, there occurred twenty-nine guerilla attacks in South Korea and eighteen incidents along the [38th] Parallel.”³⁷

In Tokyo, beginning with the Japanese surrender in 1945, MacArthur’s G-2 (intelligence) was one Charles A. Willoughby, a man who was to play a major role in the debacle of the North Korean invasion of South Korea (and later the Chinese intervention). As we shall see, Willoughby’s “performance as an intelligence officer was characterized by both success and failure, *but the latter showed up chiefly in estimation of enemy capabilities and intentions.*”³⁸

In the few months before the North Korean invasion of South Korea, in Tokyo Willoughby received and analyzed intelligence reports from sources in Korea that an invasion from the north was imminent—including one report that claimed the attack would come in June 1950.

That said, however, according to Stanley Sandler, MacArthur’s Intelligence Section in Japan did not believe that a North Korean attack on the South was imminent.

According to Blair, a March 1950 analysis from Willoughby to the Pentagon contemplated ongoing guerilla and psychological warfare directed to South Korea but no civil war either in spring or summer.

There are two interesting points to be made about G-2 Willoughby.

First, there was an obvious difference, indeed a contradiction, between the little raw data from on the ground in Korea and how it was evaluated by Willoughby's G-2 at theater level in Tokyo.

The other is Willoughby's implicit perspective that war in Korea would be a "civil war" between North and South, not aggression instigated by a foreign power such as the Soviet Union or Communist China using North Korea as a surrogate. It was naïve in the extreme for General MacArthur's longtime aide, a brigadier general responsible for theater intelligence, to believe that an unprovoked North Korean invasion of South Korea would be the start of a "civil war." That view would be akin to characterizing a Cold War-era attack by East Germany on West Germany as a "civil war" simply because there were Germans on both sides of the conflict.

Willoughby's superior at the Pentagon was Army-level G-2 General Joe Collins. At about the same time that Willoughby was opining about threats in Korea, Collins wrote there was no need to worry about Communist war-making on the peninsula because they were busy elsewhere in Southeast Asia (e.g., Vietnam). According to Secretary of State Acheson, Collins's analysis was supported by intelligence personnel in Tokyo, at the CIA, and at the Department of State. Of course, they all thought, it was always possible that the North would attack the South, but it was not imminent in the summer of 1950.

By then, the situation was this: The U.S. government's official position, as consistently expressed by its civilian and military leadership, was that South Korea was of no strategic importance to the United States, that there might or might not be a North Korean invasion which might or might not be imminent, but if an invasion occurred the ROKs could handle it. But in no event was North Korean aggression of any concern to the United States. The United Nations would have to deal with the problem.

On March 15, 1950, KMAG's General Roberts, apparently having swallowed a dose of realism as an antidote to his earlier unwarranted optimism, conceded that in case of an attack the North Korean Army would give the Republic of Korea "a bloody nose" and that the ROK "would be gobbled up to be added to the rest of Red Asia."

Thus, against the official Washington policy of "United States'-hands-off-Korea-we don't care-the-ROKs-can-handle-things-and-it's-the-UN's-problem-anyhow" was the contradictory and pessimistic opinion of the KMAG commander on the ground in Korea that the ROKs could *not* handle North Korean aggression, and that South Korea *would* fall under North Korean domination.

But General Roberts, like all the others, wasn't expecting an invasion, even though he was present in South Korea and was so close to the 38th Parallel he could have driven there in a couple of hours.

As if the government's policy had not been made clear enough, in May 1950 the United States handed another engraved invitation to the North Korean Communists (and their Chinese and Soviet patrons). No lesser a public figure than Senator Tom Connally of Texas, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told *U.S. News and World Report*, explicitly, that the United States *would* abandon South Korea if the North attacked because the security of the South was not essential to the strategy the United States had in place for Asia. Whatever that strategy was.

Worse was Connally's elaboration of his remarks about abandoning South Korea. He predicted an invasion was going to happen, South Korea would be overrun, and, for good measure, eventually Formosa would be as well.

In the same interview, Connally was asked whether Korea was an essential part of America's defense strategy. Though he had already answered the question, he said flatly, "No," repeating the MacArthur-Acheson boundaries of America's defense perimeter. South Korea was not "absolutely essential."

At about the same time, the CIA weighed in with the same conclusion: Even without Chinese or Soviet military units in play, North Korea could overrun and hold *at minimum* the upper area of South Korea, including the capital city of Seoul.

Two months later, on June 1, 1950, with the invasion fuse burning ever closer to South Korea, the United States Far East Air Force's Intelligence Section offered the same conclusion: "South Korea will fall before a North Korean invasion"

None of these opinions are surprising, in light of the available intelligence. According to William Manchester, "Willoughby, who maintained an extensive intelligence net on the peninsula, [had] filed 1,195 reports between June 1949 and June 1950, reporting among other things, that Chinese Communist troops of Korean descent had been entering the Democratic People's Republic in great numbers since the defeat of Chiang [Kai-shek], and that a massive buildup of Red shock troops, far in excess of [South Korean President] Rhee's forces in the south, was under way north of the 38th Parallel. In the third week of March Willoughby's G-2 section in Tokyo, agreeing with the CIA, prophesied war in the late spring or early summer."³⁹

In light of all this, on the surface it's puzzling how just a few weeks earlier, in mid-May 1950, MacArthur could have told C. L. Sulzberger of *The New York Times* that he did not believe war was imminent, because the world would not permit it.⁴⁰

One explanation for MacArthur's statement (assuming the general was quoted accurately by the *Times*) is that he was still outside the Washington-dominated South Korea intelligence loop, from which he had been completely removed earlier.

In sum, there was no doubt that the American political and military leadership had officially and publicly turned its back on the defense of South Korea. There was disagreement, however, about whether a North Korean attack was imminent and, if one

was launched, whether it could be repulsed by the ROKs, because various intelligence agencies had reached different conclusions.

Intelligence, in this context, consists of raw data which is then evaluated. Analysts must make predictions about how others will behave. Other intelligence personnel—e.g., order of battle specialists—must determine from the available data what is actually happening.

In matters of such crucial importance—the fate of South Korea and the stability of Asia—it must be asked why the intelligence picture, especially North Korean order of battle, was so cloudy.

Professor James has offered an explanation⁴¹ of what went wrong, and the role played by MacArthur's Far East Command headquarters in the lack of reliable and actionable intelligence—one which, unfortunately, presaged the Chinese intervention several months later.

James reminds us that after mid-1949, responsibility for intelligence concerning North Korea was removed from the jurisdiction of MacArthur's Far East Command in Tokyo (even though G-2 Willoughby apparently had some assets on the ground in Korea). This crucially important intelligence task was shifted to the relatively small KMAG detachment of American advisors in South Korea. KMAG's expertise in and capability for tactical, let alone strategic, intelligence was virtually nil, and that unit should not have been tasked with any intelligence responsibility at all, let alone one of such paramount importance. Because there were no American combat troops in South Korea, the intelligence function, especially order of battle, properly belonged at theater level in Tokyo.⁴²

For the next year, the State Department and CIA did send reports to Washington about military events in North Korea, especially in the late spring of 1950 when a large buildup of men and materiel was seen just north of the 38th Parallel. At the same time, the CIA reported continuation of the same business-as-usual incursions, infiltrations, guerilla warfare, and propagandistic saber rattling by both sides, which had been occurring for years. Acheson later claimed that the same sources, though recognizing the possibility of an attack, discounted its occurring in the summer of 1950.

Nor did the Joint Intelligence Committee, in a report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff *a mere three days before the attack*, predict imminent military action.⁴³

Nor did the Department of Defense, it later claimed, anticipate such action.

Nor, Truman later asserted, did any of the intelligence reports provided to him.

Ranking State Department officer Dean Rusk, later to become secretary of state, has written in his memoirs that the "North Korean invasion came as a complete surprise. Only four days before I had told a congressional committee we saw no evidence of war brewing in Korea."⁴⁴ Apparently, like Captain Renault in *Casablanca*, when Rusk

learned that gambling was occurring at Rick's Cafe, the State Department functionary and his colleagues were "shocked, shocked."

To say the least, even absent a formal intelligence or order of battle detachment on the ground in Seoul, there was no way the massive movement of North Korean troops and equipment close to the 38th Parallel, and removal of countless North Korean civilians from that area, could have escaped KMAG and South Korean eyes. Nor could even rookie intelligence operatives have avoided the obvious conclusion that the enemy was massing just across the 38th Parallel for a specific purpose. And that purpose wasn't maneuvers.

As a matter of fact, when in May 1950, only a month before the invasion South Korea's defense minister reported that the North's order of battle (which he underestimated) included Soviet T-34 medium tanks, against which South Korea possessed no defensive weapons, Everette Drumright, American chargé d'affaires in Seoul, came up with his own low-ball numbers for the Communist armor. According to Professor Thornton, Drumright must have been under orders to minimize the danger of invasion.⁴⁵

Soon after, a North Korean informant gave Far East Command intelligence in Tokyo a detailed report about a new NKPA tank brigade consisting of an estimated 180 light and medium tanks, thousands of troops, and a plethora of anti-tank guns, artillery, and vehicles. No one warned Seoul.⁴⁶

In mid-June 1950 MacArthur, Willoughby, and senior staff met in Tokyo with Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson, Joint Chiefs Chairman General Bradley, and KMAG's General Roberts. From what MacArthur was told, Bradley was greatly relieved that the United States had no cause for concern in Korea. It is not known who, or what, provided General Bradley that measure of relief.

The day after the North Korean attack, however, CIA Director Rear Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter would pass the buck when testifying before a Senate committee. He claimed that the CIA had predicted an imminent attack, but that unnamed *federal* officials had not paid proper attention to them. Hillenkoetter, choosing his words carefully by use of the characterization "federal," did not expressly implicate *military* officials. By implication, at least, that left Washington *civilians*.

Also, in the attack's aftermath General MacArthur contended that Willoughby had expected an attack in the summer, that Willoughby had passed on his analyses to Washington, and that his information had been met with apathy.

Note that Douglas MacArthur, a precise wordsmith when he needed to be, had used oblique words such as "Washington," not laying specific blame on any named individuals. But the "apathy" of which he spoke had to have been in Washington, because nowhere else did the Far East Command have military superiors who, in turn, had civilian superiors who were ultimately accountable to the commander in chief, President Harry Truman.

For his part, Willoughby, “who had set up a small intelligence unit on the peninsula called the Korean Liaison Office, vehemently asserted that he had provided adequate warnings to the Army G-2 [his superior] in Washington. * * * In his memoirs of 1954, Willoughby quoted a number of his G-2 reports to Washington predicting a North Korean attack in June.”⁴⁷

Professor James surmises that Washington discounted Willoughby’s reports principally for three reasons. First, because his earlier relationships with them had made him some powerful enemies. Next, because it was perceived that Willoughby’s attempt from distant Tokyo to obtain intelligence and order of battle information about the NKPA in North Korea took him off his own reservation and onto turf which “some in Washington” regarded as their own—even though Willoughby was geographically much closer to North Korea and actually had some agents and other intelligence assets on the ground. Finally, because it was believed that Willoughby’s intelligence assets on the ground in Korea were providing him hedged, contradictory information and that caused the data he forwarded up the chain of command to Washington to be tainted.⁴⁸

Whether there was an unforgivable intelligence failure somewhere between agents on the ground in Korea and the commander in chief in Washington, rather than something more sinister, is a crucial question.

For example, the U.S. Army’s study of policy and command in the first year of the Korean War asserted categorically that “American intelligence failed to predict the time, strength, and actual launching of the attack *because of reluctance to accept all the reports rendered by Koreans, a distrust of Oriental agents and sources, and a belief that the South Koreans were inclined to cry wolf*. . . . Signs which marked the prelude of the North Korean attack had become accepted as routine communist activity. . . .”⁴⁹

There are two serious problems with the Army’s explanation for the alleged intelligence “failure to predict.” One is that there were other reports, even possible signals intelligence and code-breaking information, which did not rest on distrusted “Oriental agents” (and which would have been held very close). The other is that previous “routine communist activity” did not exhibit the massive buildup and movement of countless North Korean troops and equipment close to, and civilians away from, the 38th Parallel.

The Army report makes two more startling statements.

One is the dismissive observation that “In the final analysis, the controversy over the intelligence failure in Korea is academic.”

If there was an intelligence failure, it was hardly “academic.”

“In the final analysis,” if there was an intelligence failure building on the ground in Korea during June 1950, it facilitated the North Korean “surprise” attack. It also cost the United States, South Korea, and our other allies’ uncounted lives and treasure.

The failure, at least on this analysis, appears to lie not in Tokyo, but in Washington.⁵⁰

Indeed, according to Kenneth A. Daigler, “[t]he United States was caught by surprise because, within political and military leadership circles in Washington, the perception existed that only the Soviets could order an invasion by a ‘client state’ and that such an act would be a prelude to a world war. Washington was confident that the Soviets were not ready to take such a step, and, therefore, no such invasion would occur.”⁵¹ Daigler has written that:

This perception, and indeed its broad acceptance within the Washington policy community, is clearly stated in a 19 June [1950] CIA paper on DRPK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, North Korea] military capabilities. The paper said that “The DPRK is a firmly controlled Soviet satellite that exercises no independent initiative and depends entirely on the support of the USSR for existence.”⁵²

Although MacArthur’s Far East Command had been cut out of the Korea loop an entire year before the North Korean invasion, still, his G-2 had some assets on the ground on the peninsula. Yes, Willoughby sent his intelligence up the chain of command to Washington. But as we’ve seen, according to Professor James’s analysis Willoughby’s intelligence met with a hostile reception for personal reasons, for policy reasons, and because of an apparent inability or unwillingness of Willoughby’s superior G-2 officers in the Pentagon to separate the useful wheat from the useless chaff—though, after all, that’s what intelligence officers are supposed to do.

But there’s another possible explanation of what occurred in Korea on June 25, 1950, one which has mega-serious implications—an explanation even worse than an intelligence failure concerning whether and when the North Koreans would invade the South. That explanation posits such immorally Machiavellian conduct by America’s national leadership as to be nearly unbelievable, yet it is grounded largely in the Army’s own study of policy and command for the first year of the Korean War.

With amazing candor, as Professor James observes, the Army study states that “[t]he *United States had no plans to counter an invasion, even had it been forecast to the very day.*”⁵³

That’s correct. Please read the sentence again.

According to an official U.S. Army study, even if the intelligence coming out of Korea and passed up the line through Tokyo to Washington had revealed the very day, even the actual hour, North Korea would attack, *the United States had no plans to defend South Korea against the Communist invasion.*

This astonishing admission confirms what we have seen in the oft-repeated official statements that the South Koreans were on their own in case of an attack and why, despite considerable and mounting evidence to the contrary, Washington and others did not seem too concerned with the likelihood of a North Korean invasion, let alone an

imminent one. Indeed, it explains why the U.S. civilian and military axis was on the same page about North Korean intentions and capabilities.

But it does not explain why in 1949 and 1950 the United States would allow North Korea to invade South Korea, nor does it explain the apparent contradiction that once the attack occurred, Truman, and through him the United Nations, quickly came to the South's defense.⁵⁴

For that explanation we must turn to the revealing scholarship of Professor Richard C. Thornton, who has described his provocative book—*Odd Man Out, Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*—as “not another military history of the Korean War” but instead a “political history of the American-Soviet-Chinese interaction that produced the war and determined the shape of global politics from then to now.”⁵⁵

Odd Man Out is more than a revelation.

It's fair to call the book a fact-supported, well-reasoned indictment.

4. STALIN, MAO, KIM—AND KOREA

Professor Thornton's thoroughly sourced facts are damning, and the conclusions he draws from them are even worse.

*The Truman administration's policy toward South Korea in 1950 resembled nothing so much as tethering a goat to trap a tiger, a tiger that American leaders knew was preparing to spring.*⁵⁶

Why?

Because, Thornton argues, *official American policy* (i.e., Truman's and Acheson's) *wanted North Korea to attack the South.*

Strong medicine, indeed. But the reader best keep an open mind.

Here's the crux of Professor Thornton's analysis:

Stalin's war [in Korea] . . . was designed to serve larger purposes beyond the [Communist] unification of Korea, which, however, was Kim Il-sung's only interest. Above all, the war marked the decisive step in Stalin's struggle with Mao to pit China against the United States and prevent the Chinese leader from establishing relations with the United States. *Yet the conflict also offered the United States the opportunity to put into place a global containment strategy that went far beyond the immediate issue of Korea.*⁵⁷

As we shall see, as the result of the Korean War Stalin was a big winner. Kim broke even. Mao and the United States won some points, but lost others.

The big losers? The countless dead, wounded, captured, and missing.

Consider the following indisputable facts about the one minor and four major players in Asian geopolitics in 1949-1950.

Chiang Kai-shek and the remnant of his anti-Communist Nationalist forces had retreated to the island of Formosa some ninety miles off the Chinese mainland. Other than as a source of often dubious intelligence about the Chinese in North Korea, and as a threat that Nationalist troops might attack the mainland or be used on the ground in Korea, Nationalist forces played no role in the Korean War. Chiang's goal was to stay safe on Formosa and, quixotically, regain the mainland.

Mao Tse-tung had secured much of the Chinese mainland by October 1949 and established a Communist government. But his revolution was incomplete, lacking achievement of three major goals: (1) establishing a new, hopefully more equal, relationship with the Soviet Union; (2) "liberating" Formosa and defeating Chiang; and, after that, (3) fostering workable relations with the United States and other nations.

Kim Il-sung's only goal was the reunification of Korea under his Communist dictatorship.

Josef Stalin's major goal was to create geographical buffers around the U.S.S.R. and keep Communist China dependent on the Soviet Union, preventing it from establishing workable relations with the United States.⁵⁸

Harry Truman's goal, formalized as early as January 1949, was to contain the Soviet Union in Europe, establish workable relations with Mao's China, and prevent it from becoming too cozy with the Soviet Union.⁵⁹ However, because of powerful domestic political considerations ("Who lost China?"), getting cozy with the mainland Chinese Communists first required Truman's abandonment of the Formosa regime and the downfall of Chiang, our wartime ally. For the United States, it was an "either/or" choice.

Thus, as to the Stalin-Mao axis of the Stalin-Mao-Kim-Truman quartet, Professor Thornton suggests that "[i]t was Stalin's objective to employ conflict in Korea to maneuver China into confrontation with the United States, and thus subordinate Mao to Soviet strategy."⁶⁰ Stalin's sacrificial pawn would be North Korea's Kim Il-sung.

The plot thickened for Mao, Stalin, Kim, and Truman in August 1949, when the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb—an event that impelled American policymakers to make even more of an effort to keep Communist China and the Soviet Union out of each other's embrace.

But on Formosa, our old World War II ally Chiang Kai-shek, his Nationalist government, and the Kuomintang Party were inconvenient millstones around the neck of American foreign policy, especially because of the strong public and congressional support for the anti-Communist Chinese hunkered down on their island across from the mainland China.

On October 1, 1949, through an announcement in Beijing by the Chinese Communist Party, the People's Republic of China came into formal existence. Stalin's fear—a total Mao victory, not a fragmented China divided between the Communists and Nationalists that would have kept the Chinese Communists weaker and more dependent on the Soviet Union—had become a reality.

On December 16, 1949, Mao arrived in Moscow to negotiate a Sino-Soviet "Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance." In the background, very much a junior partner, was North Korea's Kim Il-sung. He had just requested that Mao repatriate to North Korea and put under Kim's command thousands of indigenous Korean fighters who, having been sent to China by the Soviet Union, had fought for years on the side of the Chinese Communists against both the Japanese Empire and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.

Professor Thornton maintains that these troops were “a critical component in the CCP’s [Chinese Communist Party’s] victory in the civil war.”⁶¹ Initially, they would outfight the untested, ill-equipped, and sacrificial South Koreans.

Mao’s desire to unify China by taking Formosa and Kim’s obsession for a Korea united under his Communist dictatorship, combined with the latter’s request for repatriation of Korean troops, unavoidably raised for Mao what Professor Thornton calls the “Who first?” question. Other important questions were: “Would a North Korean attempt to unify the peninsula preempt Mao’s determination to complete the Chinese revolution with the seizure of [Formosa], or conversely would Mao forestall Kim? How would Stalin try to gain leverage on Mao in the coming treaty negotiations? What was the Soviet dictator up to?”⁶²

Thus, out of the Stalin-Mao December 1949 meetings came, among other things, Mao’s fervently expressed desire that Kim’s unification war in Korea be delayed until Formosa was conquered by the Chinese Communists. What also came of the meetings, thanks to master chess player Stalin but against Mao’s wishes, was the commencement of the Korean War six months later—and, consequently, a new challenge and different direction for American foreign policy.

As to the Korean War itself, some believe Stalin was pushed over the edge to approve Kim’s attack on South Korea when on December 19, 1950, Mao cabled his comrades in China—in what may have been simply an adroit chess move—authorizing them to pursue diplomatic relations with the United States, which was then at least theoretically feasible. There is no doubt that a Communist China–U.S. rapprochement was unacceptable to the Soviet dictator. Stalin’s way of preventing it was to start a war in Korea, which would eventually force Mao into it on Kim’s side against the United States.⁶³

Accordingly, at the end of 1949 and in early 1950 Stalin and the North Koreans began gearing up for an attack on South Korea. Mao, for his part, was preparing to complete the Chinese revolution by “liberating” Formosa.

As to the forthcoming Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Soviet financial assistance to the Chinese, and mutual trade agreements, the American foreign policy establishment was caught flat-footed. It had believed that Mao would look toward the United States as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union, but China appeared to be moving closer to the U.S.S.R.⁶⁴

Among other problems a Sino-Soviet entente would cause for the United States were those arising from America’s post–World War II demobilization and recent Soviet possession of the atomic bomb, because with the Communists’ borders secure each could turn to other matters of concern to them. Formosa, for Mao. Europe, for Stalin.

In an effort to keep Mao from consummating the treaty with Stalin, in early January 1950 Truman and Acheson capitulated. They announced a shutdown of the military equipment pipeline to Chiang’s remnant forces on Formosa, recognition of the

Communists' "right" to the island, acceptance of Communist domination in China, and an assurance that the Chinese Communists had nothing to fear from the United States. In short, the president of the United States and his secretary of state gave away the store to Mao.

America—a scant five years earlier the World War II victor in Europe and Asia, and the world's uncontested superpower—had become a supplicant to the backward, war-weary, non-industrialized nation of near universally illiterate Chinese peasants.

The paranoid Stalin concluded from the Truman administration's supplication to Mao that the Chinese and Americans had some kind of an agreement about Formosa, that Mao could work his will on Chiang once Sino-American relations had been normalized. This, Stalin reasoned, meant that somehow he had to pit Mao against the United States sooner than later.⁶⁵

As events would soon demonstrate, the Truman-Acheson attempted seduction of Mao, who relentlessly continued to plan for an attack on Formosa sometime in the summer of 1950, would be unsuccessful. The United States' grand strategy of keeping China and the Soviet Union apart—despite the proffered, one-sided concessions, including the sellout of Formosa—would fail.

Their failure caused Truman and Acheson, consummate pragmatists each, to shift gears into a new strategy built on the world as it was and would be, rather than on the one they wished for—a strategy which necessarily assumed that both China and the Soviet Union would be America's antagonists. Stalin had the atomic bomb, Mao had China, and the two Communists were apparently in cahoots.

The Truman administration's new policy was contained in the supposedly secret document NSC-68, a National Security Council "fundamental reassessment" of the ends and means of American national security which, according to Professor Thornton, "established the basic rationale for American rearmament and global containment in the face of growing Soviet military power augmented by the Sino-Soviet alliance."⁶⁶

Chiang Kai-shek and Formosa would no longer be left to the tender mercies of Mao and his Chinese Communists. Now, in an amazing reversal, the nearly sold-out Generalissimo and his island would be part of America's Asian containment defense perimeter.

As between Mao and Kim, the race was on as to who would strike first, thereby almost certainly precluding the other from acting. Would Mao move first, against Formosa? Or would Kim, against South Korea?

If Mao moved first and succeeded in eliminating Nationalist control over Formosa and bringing the island under Chinese Communist control, many observers believed that he could establish relations with the United States.

If Kim moved first, and inevitably China had to go to war against the United States in Korea, no Chinese relationship with the United States would be possible—the outcome devoutly wished by Stalin.⁶⁷

In another move to keep China and the United States apart, Stalin met with Kim Il-sung in Moscow for three weeks in early May 1950. The Soviet dictator made it clear to the would-be Communist unifier of Korea that should the United States intervene in the war, the North Koreans would have to rely on help only from Mao's Chinese Communists, not from Stalin.

How convenient for Stalin. Kim and Mao against the United States and the United Nations. With Stalin on the sidelines.

While Truman and Acheson were keeping NSC-68 and its radical gear-shifting policies and provisions secret, the Soviet Union was providing thousands of tons of military hardware to North Korea. As China prepared to invade Formosa. American intelligence watched.

The race was on—although Stalin was doing more to supply Kim for his South Korea adventure than he was doing to assist Mao with his plans to invade Formosa—all the while allowing Kim to believe Mao would support the North Korean's attack on the South, if necessary.

One part of this complicated chess game was that “Stalin's strategy of employing Korea as a tar baby to pit China against the United States required that North Korea *fail* in its attempt to defeat the South.”⁶⁸ Another part of Stalin's Machiavellian scheme was that if Kim did fail, in order to protect Communist China's own border from a Korea unified under the flags of the United States, South Korea, and the United Nations, the Chinese would have to intervene and go to war with the United States.

Another aspect of the chess game was related to the United States. We'll soon see that although for obvious reasons the United States, too, wanted the North Koreans to fail, Professor Thornton argues that in another, more important, respect Truman and Acheson also wanted Kim's invasion to fail—*but not too quickly*. “*Stalin started the Korean War, but the United States used it for larger purposes.*”⁶⁹

At first, Professor Thornton's horrifically stunning yet analytically sound explanation of Stalin's gambit seem absurd. Kim was a longtime, die-hard Communist, who had devoted his entire adult life to Communist reunification of North Korea. It would appear that Communist hegemony over the entire Korean Peninsula, through Kim's dictatorship, would certainly be in Stalin's interest.

But Stalin, looking at merely an acceptable half-a-loaf, had a much larger appetite. He wanted a war between China and the United States, and if Kim's North Korean Army had to be sacrificed for the greater Soviet good, then so be it. All in the cause of Communist solidarity.

Professor Thornton's thesis goes a long way to explaining the conduct of both the Soviet Union and the United States in the early 1950 run-up to the commencement of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula later in June. New data he examined⁷⁰ about the North's war plans, formulated largely by the Soviets, and the war materiel provided and not provided by Moscow to Kim's regime and the timing of its delivery, "*show rather clearly Stalin's intent to prevent the North from winning.*"⁷¹ The Soviet dictator didn't help the North protect its ever-lengthening supply lines, nor provide air support or defenses, or much of anything else.⁷²

There is additional evidence to support Professor Thornton's thesis that Stalin wanted, and expected, Kim's invasion of South Korea to fail. Immediately after the invasion began—prematurely, because as far as anyone knew at that time the attack's success remained unclear—Stalin began urging Mao to intervene. Stalin wanted Mao in the fight against the United States as early as possible.

As the NKPA invasion forces rolled south, Stalin counseled Kim to throw all his forces at the Pusan Perimeter. If Kim had complied, that tactic would have left the North Koreans exposed to a United Nations counterattack not only from the Pusan Perimeter, but in their rear as well—which is exactly what happened when MacArthur's forces later landed on the west coast at Inchon.

When the Inchon landing occurred, leading to encirclement of the North Korean Army, Stalin provided no assistance to the Communist survivors. Instead, he kept demanding that Mao intervene—even before MacArthur's forces crossed the 38th parallel, let alone headed for the Yalu River border between North Korea and China.⁷³ Stalin kept pushing Mao.

If the plausibility of Stalin's use-Kim-to-get-Mao gambit understandably seems difficult to accept, it would seem even more unbelievable that while Truman and Acheson wanted the United States/United Nations to repel the North Korean aggression—about the possibility of which the two were at best equivocal—they didn't want that to happen "too fast."

Again, Professor Thornton makes a compellingly damning case.

A partial reason for American conduct during the Korean War, he explains, was the need to have Congress appropriate rearmament funds far in excess of what was required for that limited conflict alone. The drafters of NSC-68 subsequently divulged what was not included in that document: that they had envisaged successive \$50 billion defense budgets *to produce the level of rearmament required to satisfy the needs of globalized containment beyond that required for the Korean conflict.*⁷⁴

Worse even than the revelation of this Machiavellian Truman-Acheson scheme to use the Korean hostilities simply as a means to the end of wider global anti-Communist defense, Professor Thornton believes that in the time period between Eighth Army's successful breakout from the Pusan Perimeter and MacArthur's simultaneous spectacular landing at Inchon, and several weeks later when the Chinese intervened,

there existed possible ways to end the war. But ending it then, according to Professor Thornton, “*would not have generated a threat large enough to produce desired appropriations levels. There can be little doubt that a short war in which American forces were victorious would not have resulted in major defense budget appropriations.*”⁷⁵

If this monstrously immoral political-military scenario is true—and it appears eminently plausible—Truman and Acheson sacrificed uncountable human lives, over 30,000 of them American, and billions of dollars, on the altar of their global anti-Communist rearmament and containment policy.

By deliberately leaving South Korea defenseless in the face of a known massive buildup of North Korean infantry, artillery, and armor, the Truman-Acheson Realpolitik⁷⁶ trumped both principle and morality. “[T]he United States did not wish to deter an attack. Indeed, from its actions and inaction in 1950, Washington invited one.”⁷⁷

It is eminently plausible that to the everlasting shame of President Harry Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and other apparatchik members of the administration in Washington who marched in lockstep to ignore North Korea’s evident intention to attack South Korea while denying the South even the rudiments of self-defense, the Korean War was a mere gambit using pawns in a worldwide chess game played against the Soviet Union by American politicians, diplomats, and bureaucrats.

The pieces in that game were moved around the board not in Seoul or even Tokyo, but in Washington.

Beginning on June 25, 1950, an incalculably high cost of that game began to be paid by the non-communist world—in lives, in U.S. treasure and prestige, and in the balance of power throughout Asia between Communism and the free world.

The exaction of that price began on Sunday, June 25, 1950, at 4:40 a.m. local time, when hordes of North Korean troops, supported by armor and artillery, swarmed across the 38th Parallel into the virtually defenseless Republic of South Korea.⁷⁸

In addition to Professor Thornton’s analysis there are other theories about the primary cause of the North Korean invasion of South Korea. An oft-cited one is Truman’s lack of any capacity for grand strategy, and thus his failure to bolster American foreign policy with military power. In turn, his failure was supposedly attributable to his myopic experience as an artillery commander in World War I, and his resulting belief that the Pentagon was trying to take advantage of him on budgetary matters.⁷⁹

A corollary for those who hold this view is that the United States should have had a much greater military presence in South Korea, and that administration statements invited the North to attack.⁸⁰

But while Clay Blair and those who share his view of the invasion’s disastrous causes are correct as far as their analyses go, they do not account for Professor Thornton’s

convincing thesis that Truman and Acheson wanted a semi-prolonged war, which would serve their wider global rearmament goals. Thus, Blair and the rest do not address the real reason the American government starved the South Korean military of training and equipment with which it could have better, if not necessarily successfully, defended its country.

And starve the South Koreans we did.

5. REPUBLIC OF KOREA ARMY vs. NORTH KOREAN PEOPLE'S ARMY

To understand fully the consequences of the American policy machinations that bore fruit on June 25, 1950, it is necessary to know how outmanned and outgunned the South Koreans were on that day, and what had caused them to be defenseless.

On the eve of the North Korean invasion of the South, the Republic of Korea's armed forces consisted of about 100,000 Army troops, 6,000 sailors in the Coast Guard, 2,000 Air Force personnel, and nearly 50,000 national police.

As the North Korean invasion approached, South Korean infantry divisions along the 38th Parallel were armed mostly with American World War II weapons. "The South Korean armed forces had no tanks, no medium artillery, no 4.2 in. mortars, no recoilless rifles, and no fighter aircraft or bombers. The divisions engaged in fighting guerillas in the eastern and southern mountains had a miscellany of small arms, including many Japanese . . . World War II rifles."⁸¹

Even worse, "[i]n June 1950 the ROK Army supply of artillery and mortar ammunition on hand was small and would be exhausted by a few days of combat. An estimated 15 percent of the weapons and 35 percent of the vehicles of the ROK Army were unserviceable. The six months' supply of spare parts originally provided by the United States was exhausted."⁸²

On the north side of the 38th Parallel, however, things were very different.

Beginning long before the Japanese surrender in 1945, Korean Communists and their Soviet and Chinese patrons made plans for the entire Korean Peninsula to fall under control of a Kim Il-sung dictatorship. To understand what they had in mind, it is necessary first to consider the early days of the Communist revolution in China.

The North Korean People's Army⁸³ that would attack South Korea on June 25, 1950, had its origin in two groups that competed politically and militarily. One was the Yen-an Group, the other the Kapsan Group.

The Yen-an Group consisted of Koreans living in China who, beginning in 1939, were led by Mao Zedong, and fought with him in World War II against the Japanese and then against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in the Chinese civil war. These Koreans, numbering about 2,500, had been conscripted into the Japanese army, deserted, and joined the Chinese Communists. Some of them were then formed into the Korean Volunteer Army (KVA).

The Kapsan Group was made up mostly of Soviet citizens of Korean ancestry and anti-Japanese Korean partisans who had emigrated from Korea to the Soviet Union. The most prominent leader of this group was Kim Il-sung.

Kim had left Korea in his youth, resided in China for many years, and trained in revolution and war in the Soviet Union. During the mid-1930s, Kim led Korean guerillas who fought the Japanese in the northern regions of Korea and in Manchuria. In 1939 Kim and his force were driven out of their operational area and fled to the U.S.S.R. where he was recruited by Soviet intelligence and eventually given command of a battalion-strength formation consisting of Chinese, Koreans, and Soviets. Kim's mission was to obtain intelligence on the Japanese forces in Korea and Manchuria.

When in September 1945 the Soviets occupied Korea north of the 38th Parallel, Korean troops under Kim's command were returned to Korea by ship. There, in North Korea, he soon established a Communist regime.

Early the next year, the North Koreans began to create the nucleus of their army, calling it the "Peace Preservation Officers' Training Schools."

By late 1946, the Soviets were aggressively creating the NKPA and North Korean Communist internal security forces. Tables of organization were drawn up, officer training schools and centers were established, equipment was obtained.

The so-called "constabularies" in reality were infantry units led by officers who were members of the Kapsan, and they were mostly Communists. But one way or another, the Soviets were in charge.

At the core of the NKPA were battle-hardened veterans from World War II and the Chinese civil war who for years had fought the Japanese and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces.⁸⁴

By 1949, the Chinese Communists controlled most of the mainland, with, as we've seen, hardly a tear shed by the Truman administration.

Early in 1950, Soviet and Communist Chinese officials met to consider an invasion of the South. As a result, the human and materiel buildup of the NKPA went into high gear. Tens of thousands of Korean fighters, battle-hardened veterans who had fought with the Chinese Communist Army against the Japanese and Nationalists, were, at Kim Il-sung's request, returned by Mao to Korea. There were between 50,000 and 70,000 of these troops (about one-third of the NKPA), and they would be the vanguard of Kim's attack on the South.⁸⁵

By then, thanks to their Soviet patrons, the North Koreans had excellent medium tanks, versus the South Koreans' none. The Communists had three different kinds of artillery, one of which had almost twice the range of South Korean howitzers, and the North outgunned the South in artillery pieces three to one.

The North Koreans had a small tactical air force, the South Koreans had none.

The North Koreans—longstanding ideological, political, and military junior allies of their Soviet and Chinese Communist patrons—possessed all the requisites for ground

combat: infantry, artillery, and armor. Before the North Korean invasion, Stalin substantially increased the battle-readiness of their forces. By June 1950 the North Koreans had become a formidable fighting force in men, training, and equipment.

It is gross understatement to say the North Koreans—even putting aside the aggressive ideology that drove them—were merely superior to the South’s forces, and that the latter were woefully unprepared for the attack that would inevitably, and soon, come. The situation was far worse than that, as post-invasion events would prove.

For those on the ground, however, like the MAC contingent in South Korea—which had no access to the high-level intelligence which others were supposed to possess—the North Korean superiority “was not generally recognized . . . by [some] United States military authorities before the invasion. In fact, there was the general feeling, apparently shared by Brig. Gen. William L. Roberts on the eve of invasion, that *if attacked from North Korea the ROK Army would have no trouble in repelling the invaders.*”⁸⁶ In an absurd, utterly unsupported, down-home-sounding observation that would rightly haunt him later, Roberts continued to opine that the South Koreans had “the best doggoned shooting army outside the United States.”⁸⁷

Unlike the Yalu, Imjin, Han, and Naktong, denial is not a river in Korea! Indeed, denial is often fatal—as it proved to be beginning in the dark hours of June 25, 1950.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to stress two important points.

First, General Douglas MacArthur, had no individual culpability for the North Korean invasion.⁸⁸

When the NKPA poured across the 38th Parallel in the early morning hours of June 25, 1950, General MacArthur had been pro-consul in Japan for nearly five years, an enormously powerful presence who had his hands full there, with Korea a mere sideshow until the invasion.

Clay Blair, Jr., no friend of the general, has noted that MacArthur had little interest in what was happening politically and militarily in China and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. According to Blair, the general, who was attempting to turn vanquished Imperial Japan—with its centuries of emperor worship, ancestor veneration, and ancient bushido and samurai codes—into a Western-type democracy, had little time to leave Tokyo. Moreover, Blair conceded that MacArthur had little time for Korea because he was burdened with pressing post-war problems in occupied Japan.

True enough. But what Blair neglected to add that was that the general had little time for Korea not because of disinterest, but *because he had been explicitly removed from the loop by his military and civilian superiors in Washington.*

Because MacArthur had no instructions from Washington to defend South Korea against a North Korean attack, his staff had made no plans for such a contingency. Whomever was in the chain of command for South Korea, it did not include General MacArthur on June 25, 1950.

That said, within a few months he had turned the tide.

Although two years earlier Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley “had stated that ‘the Army of 1948 could not fight its way out of a paper bag’,”⁸⁹ still, American occupation forces from Japan were quickly thrust into combat to support the sitting ducks of the Republic of Korea Army, who had been attacked by at least ten divisions of the NKPA supported by tanks, artillery, and some minor air assets.

The American forces had been drawn from four under-strength and, as Cohen and Gooch characterized them, “peacetime-soft” occupation duty divisions.⁹⁰ The first troops on the ground were from the Twenty-fourth Infantry, and they faced a ruthless, well-equipped enemy.

Bazooka rounds bounced off Soviet T-34 tanks. Unaccustomed to the Korean heat and omnipresent stench, fatigue and disease took a toll. Within the first two weeks, the Twenty-fourth Infantry Division lost nearly one-third of its initial strength. The division’s commanding officer, Major General William F. Dean, was taken prisoner fighting side by side with his men.

By August, the Americans and their ROK allies had been driven south from the 38th Parallel to the southeast tip of the peninsula at the under-defended port of Pusan. Despite huge Communist losses in men and materiel, long and fragile supply lines, and dominant daytime American air power, the NKPA hit the defenders' lines day and night, around the clock.

This was surely not what the conferees had foreseen ten years earlier in the Cairo Declaration of December 1943, where Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek had stated that "in due course" Korea was to become "free and independent." The implication, of course, was that Korea would be unified, not divided. Since at that time the Japanese still controlled Korea, as they had since 1905, the word "free" had to mean that Korea would be a democracy, not ruled by Communists or other totalitarians. But, as the Koreans would learn, "in due course" has no meaning, and implications are not express covenants.

In the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, the promise of a "free and independent" Korea was reaffirmed by Truman, Churchill, and Stalin. At least two of the conferees contemplated a unified democracy, although they should have realized (and probably did) that the third member, Stalin, had other ideas. As we've seen, Korea was a sideshow for Truman and Churchill.

The Soviet Union's August 8, 1945, declaration of war against Japan contained a commitment to Korean independence, though under whose flag was again left ambiguously unsaid. Again, Stalin had his fingers crossed behind his back.

Which brings me to my second point.

As we have seen, the military misfortune that befell South Korea beginning on June 25, 1950, did not have its genesis on that day. It began at least as far back as the final days of World War II and was caused not only by understandable mistakes (e.g., post-war demobilization) but eventually by Machiavellian schemes concocted and executed by Stalin, Mao, Kim, and Truman.

As Professor Richard C. Thornton has amply shown, the Korean War was a synthesis of the strategic goals and tactical decisions of the three Communist totalitarians, although their specific needs were not identical. The United States' response to North Korea's aggression was rooted in Truman's strategic need to finance worldwide containment of the Soviet Union.

Those Machiavellian chess moves were more than sufficient to seal the fate of millions of people.

But much worse was that the dead, wounded, captured, and missing of the Korean War were mere pawns in a geopolitical game initiated by Communists in thrall to collectivist-statist dogmas which caused North Korea to invade South Korea on June 25, 1950—a game in which the United States was a complicit player. And, as sad as it is . . . that's the rest of the story.

NOTES

¹ Fehrenbach, T.R, *This Kind of War*, 8–9. Subsequent quotations will cite “Fehrenbach.”

² This is a well-known fact. For example, see Goncharov, Sergei N., Lewis, John W., and Litai, Xue, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*, 1. Subsequent quotations will cite “Goncharev *et al.*”)

³ Manchuria at that time was the name of China’s northeastern region, consisting of three provinces. In March 1932, Japanese invaders organized the three provinces into a puppet “state” they named Manchukuo.

⁴ Unfortunately, neither for the first nor the last time, American and British intelligence made a colossal mistake. One which, together with the Roosevelt-Churchill concessions to Stalin at Yalta, would come home to roost in the Korean War five years later. American-British intelligence was apparently unaware that while its political leaders were cajoling Stalin to enter the war in Asia, at about the same time the best Japanese troops in Manchuria had been removed to defend various Japanese-occupied islands, including the home islands, leaving the remaining Manchuria garrisons understrength and a much weakened fighting force. Probably, given the Soviet assets already on the ground in Manchuria, it’s likely Stalin knew he could easily deal with those Japanese troops.

⁵ See Manchester, William, *American Caesar*, 535. Subsequent quotations will cite “Manchester.”

⁶ This is a well-known fact. For example, see Goncharov *et al.*, 2.

⁷ Outer Mongolia is today a country known by the name Mongolia, located between Siberia and China. The Chinese had long considered Outer Mongolia as part of China. In 1921, Soviet troops occupied the country. In 1924, the Communists facilitated the establishment of a “republic” by Mongolian revolutionaries, but nonetheless recognized the country as part of China. A 1936 treaty of mutual cooperation was signed by the Soviets and the Mongolian People’s Republic. Under a 1945 treaty between the Chinese Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek and the Soviet Union, China agreed to relinquish claims to Outer Mongolia, which, after a plebiscite, became a nominally independent country.

⁸ Goncharov *et al.*, 2.

⁹ “[A]bout 375,000 of the Manchurian [Japanese] army, who [later] . . . surrendered to the Russians, were kept for years in Siberia doing forced labor; only in 1950 did Russia begin returning those who had been indoctrinated as communists, in the hope of disrupting the occupation policy and throwing Japan into turmoil.” Morison, Samuel, *The Oxford History of the American People*, 1063.

¹⁰ Chiang Kai-shek was not invited to the Yalta Conference.

¹¹ This is a well-known fact. For example, see Goncharov *et al.*, 2.

¹² At Yalta, the Soviet dictator did very well for himself in Europe as well. Soviet troops overran Berlin, which was partitioned into zones (as was Vienna). Germany was divided. The United States, Britain, and France subdivided the western part, and the Soviets controlled the east. There, they fostered a Communist government. Stalin established a puppet government in Poland, annexed the eastern part of the country, and promised free elections in areas within the Soviet's sphere of influence: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. In Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania overt Communist governments were installed.

¹³ Truman was not unmindful of how President Lincoln fired Civil War General George McClellan, a fate which would later befall MacArthur at Truman's hands.

¹⁴ See Appleman, Roy Edgar, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June–November 1950): United States Army in the Korean War*, 2–3. Subsequent quotations will cite “Appleman, *South*.”)

Lt. Col. Appleman's four books about the Korean War are the historical gold standard for information about that conflict, from small-unit action at the squad level to the workings of the Far East Command in Tokyo. “With the exception of a few passages, and these largely in the first chapters,” Appleman has written, “the entire work [Appleton, *South*, and his other three books are] based on primary sources. These consist of the official records of the United States and United Nations armed forces bearing on the land, sea, and air action. ROK records were also consulted, but generally they were scant and sometimes nonexistent.” Appleman, *South*, 777.

¹⁵ Goncharov *et al.*, 5.

¹⁶ See Appleman, *South*, 3. Apparently, several brigadier generals were tasked with finding an east-west dividing line in Korea “by four o'clock this afternoon,” even though a colonel with experience in the Far East told them it made no social or economic sense. Manchester, 539, quotes Secretary of State Dean Acheson's memoirs to the effect that “[a] young officer recently returned to the Pentagon, Dean Rusk [later himself Secretary of State] from the Chinese theater, found an administrative dividing line along the 38th Parallel.”

¹⁷ See Goncharov *et al.*, 8.

¹⁸ See Goncharov *et al.*, 8. Moreover, ever since the 1930s Mao had spent much of his military resources fighting not the Japanese invaders, but Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. When the famous Chinese writer Lin Yutang—born at the turn of the twentieth century in China, but long resident in the United States and author of the classic *The Importance of Living* and other non-fiction and fiction books about China—

returned to China to report on the war, he was stunned to observe that while Chiang was fighting both the Japanese and Mao, the latter was mainly interested in fighting his Nationalist countrymen. When Dr. Lin returned to the United States and described the civil war in China, his non-fiction account, *The Vigil of a Nation*, was pilloried by American liberals, Communists, and fellow travelers alike, and he was quickly “demoted” from being a revered icon like famous author Pearl Buck to that of *persona non grata*.

¹⁹ See Goncharov *et al.*, 27.

²⁰ See Sandler, Stanley (ed.), *The Korean War, An Encyclopedia*, xiv. Subsequent quotations will cite “Sandler.” The Soviets claimed that all their troops had been removed from North Korea by December 31, 1949.

²¹ See Sandler, xiv.

²² Manchester, 539–40.

²³ See Sandler, xiv.

²⁴ See Manchester, 540.

²⁵ See Appleman, *South*, 5

²⁶ See Appleman, *South*, 5.

²⁷ Sandler, xiv. Emphasis supplied.

²⁸ Manchester, 542. Emphasis supplied.

²⁹ See Manchester, 538.

³⁰ See Sandler, xv.

³¹ See MacArthur, Douglas, *Reminiscences*, 324. Subsequent quotations will cite “*Reminiscences*.” If the military and civilian politicians didn’t themselves know what their South Korea policy was, there is no way General MacArthur could have known.

³² See Blair, Clay, *The Forgotten War*, 46. Subsequent quotations will cite “Blair.”

³³ James III, 397. I have gone out of my way to disabuse the notion that General MacArthur was somehow to blame for the North Korean invasion of South Korea. I have done so because when he is unjustly blamed for the later Chinese intervention—which is a story for another time—sometimes he is also blamed for the events of June 25, 1950.

³⁴ Manchester, 540.

³⁵ See Manchester, 540.

³⁶ James III, 413. Emphasis supplied.

³⁷ Appleman, *South*, 6.

³⁸ Unpublished paper, an edited version of which was published as Campbell, Kenneth J. “Major General Charles A. Willoughby: General MacArthur’s G-2—a Biographical Sketch.” *American Intelligence Journal* 18, No. 1/2 (1998): 87–91. Campbell, a former college professor, researched biographic information about persons prominent in the intelligence field. Subsequent quotations will cite “Campbell.”)

³⁹ See Manchester, 543.

⁴⁰ See Manchester, 544.

⁴¹ See James III, 414–17.

⁴² When I was Chief CCF Order of Battle Analyst for Eighth Army in Korea, my responsibility was for three hierarchical levels of the Chinese Communist Forces opposing us. In descending order, it began at the Chinese army level, down to corps, and then down to division. However, because Chinese unit designations were different from ours, such as the CCF “Field Army,” often my portfolio began at that level and descended four or more. Similarly, the order of battle section of U.S. Army I Corps, then headquartered at Uijongbu, was responsible for the Chinese corps facing it, down to division, and then down to regiment level. When possible, our jurisdictions were based on actual CCF strength, not their formal designations.

⁴³ See Rusk, Dean, *As I Saw It: Dean Rusk, as Told to Richard Rusk*, ed., 124. Subsequent quotations will cite “Rusk.”

⁴⁴ Rusk, 124.

⁴⁵ See Thornton, Richard C., *Odd Man Out, Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War*, 174. Subsequent quotations will cite “Thornton.”

⁴⁶ It wasn’t the first time, and it wouldn’t be the last.

⁴⁷ See James III, 416.

⁴⁸ See James III, 416.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Professor James, at James III, 417. Emphasis supplied.

⁵⁰ In writing about how the Communists outgunned the South’s forces, Lt. Col. Appleman noted that “[t]he superiority of the North Korean Army over the South Korean . . . was not generally recognized, however, by United States *military* authorities

before the invasion.” Appleman, *South*, 18. Emphasis supplied. This view is consistent with the fact that the Department of State in Washington, not the United States Army or MacArthur in Tokyo, was running the show in South Korea.

⁵¹ Daigler, Kenneth A. (writing as P. K. Rose), “Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950.” *Studies in Intelligence*, Fall–Winter 2001, 3. Subsequent quotations will cite “Daigler.”

⁵² Daigler, 3.

⁵³ James III, 417. Emphasis supplied.

⁵⁴ Since June 25, 1950, there has been a widespread popular misconception about how, in light of the Soviet veto power in the United Nations Security Council, the United States was able obtain UN approval (and some tangible support) for opposing the North Korean invasion of South Korea. When immediately after the invasion the United States sought UN assistance, the Soviets could have vetoed any resolution of the Security Council. But the Communists had launched a boycott of council proceedings several weeks earlier. Why? As Stalin explained to then Czech President Klement Gottwald, a staunch Communist, on August 27, 1950:

We temporarily absented ourselves from the Security Council for four reasons: First to demonstrate the Soviet Union’s solidarity with New China; second to emphasize the stupidity and idiocy of U.S. policy which recognizes the Guomindang scarecrow as the representative of China in the Security Council; third to render the decisions of the Security Council illegal in the absence of representatives of two great powers [in addition to the USSR, Stalin had the PRC in mind]; fourth to untie the hands of the American government and provide it an opportunity, using its majority in the Security Council, to commit new stupidities so that public opinion can view the true face of the American government.

I think we have succeeded in achieving all of these objectives.

After our departure from the Security Council America has gotten mixed up in a military intervention in Korea and is now squandering its military prestige and its moral authority. Can any honest person now doubt that in military terms it is not as strong as it claims to be? Moreover, it is clear that the United States of America has been distracted from Europe to the Far East. Does this help us out in terms of the balance of world power? Absolutely it does.

Let us suppose that the American government will become even more bogged down in the Far East and that China will be dragged into the struggle for the freedom of Korea and for its own independence. What might come out of this? First, America, like any other state, will be unable to cope with China which has at the ready large military forces. Probably, America will be weighted down by this conflict. Second, because of its being weighted down, in the short term America will be unable to fight a Third World War. Probably, a Third World War

will be put off to some indefinite future; this will ensure us the time needed to strengthen socialism in Europe. I am not even addressing the fact that a struggle between America and China will bring about revolution throughout Far Eastern Asia. Does this help us out in terms of the balance of world forces? Absolutely it does.

As you can see, the question of whether or not the Soviet Union participates in the Security Council is not such a simple question as it may appear at first glance. (Pantsov, Alexander V. with Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012, 375-76, citing “Telegramma Filippova sovetskomu poslu v Chekhoslovakii dlia Klemnta Gotval’da” (Telegram from Filippov [J.V. Stalin] to the Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia [Mikhail Alexandrovich Silin] for [the President of the Szechoslovakian Republic] Klement Gottwald, August 27, 1950), RGASPI, collection 558, inventory 11, file 62, sheets 71-72 The telegram was first published by A. M. Ledovsky in his “Stalin, mao Zedong I koreiskaia voina 1950-1953 godov” (*Stalin, Mao Zedong, and the Korean War of 1950-1953*), *Novaia I noveishaia istoriia* (Modern and contemporary history) 5 (2005): 96-97, and the first English translation, made by Gary Goldberg, appeared in the Cold War International History Project virtual archives.)

⁵⁵ Thornton, x.

⁵⁶ Thornton, 148. Emphasis supplied.

⁵⁷ Thornton, 1. Emphasis supplied.

⁵⁸ See Thornton, 2.

⁵⁹ There was, of course, the American government’s not insubstantial concern about protecting American commercial and treaty interests in China.

⁶⁰ Thornton, 2.

⁶¹ Thornton, 27.

⁶² Thornton, 88.

⁶³ See Thornton, 46.

⁶⁴ See Thornton, 22.

⁶⁵ See Thornton, 80.

As Professor Thornton notes, although Stalin had to unite the West against Mao, first the Soviet dictator had to unite the West itself. This presented a tactical problem for Stalin because a North Korean attack on South Korea would invoke the United Nations Charter, the Security Council would have jurisdiction, and Mao would expect the Soviets

to use their veto to protect the Chinese Communists from adverse action. Accordingly, Stalin made another move on his chess board. He contrived to have the Chinese Communists protest to the United Nations the Nationalists' occupancy of the "China" seat on the Security Council. In support of that "protest," the Soviets staged a walkout from the U.N., which was complete by January 13, 1950, some six months before the North Korean invasion.

"Of course, the Soviet ploy failed. The Nationalist representative retained his seat and Beijing remained isolated, but Stalin achieved his underlying objective. *The absence of a Soviet representative at the U.N. would enable the United States, without hindrance, to mobilize that body under American leadership in the wake of a North Korean attack on the South. It would not only leave China permanently dependent on Moscow, but it would also make a formal United States [Congressional] declaration of war extremely unlikely.*" Thornton, 82. Emphasis supplied.

⁶⁶ Thornton, 3.

⁶⁷ Apart from the other considerations described above, Mao had strong political/geographic/military motives to intervene later in Korea. As Fehrenbach, 10–11, observes: "Korea is a buffer state. Neither China, nor Russia, nor whatever power is dominant in the Island of the Rising Sun [Japan], dares ignore Korea. It is, has been, and will always be either a bridge to the Asian continent, or a stepping-stone to the islands, depending on where power is ascendant. * * * [F]or Korea is a breeding ground for war. * * * [W]hoever owns Manchuria [Mao's Chinese Communists after 1949], to be secure, must also own Chosun [Korea]." Thus, from Mao's perspective, for this reason alone he had no choice but to intervene on the side of the remnant North Korean army in the closing days of 1950.

⁶⁸ Thornton, 4. Emphasis supplied. To add another consideration, as Patrick C. Roe has written in *The Dragon Strikes*, "Historically, Korea was within the Chinese sphere of influence. From medieval times until 1905 when it was occupied by the Japanese, Korea had been a buffer and a satellite state of China. The Chinese had a keen appreciation of Korea's value as an avenue of approach [to the mainland]." Roe, 25. Subsequent quotations will cite "Roe."

⁶⁹ Thornton, 5. Emphasis supplied.

⁷⁰ Professor Thornton's *Odd Man Out* was published in 2000.

⁷¹ Thornton, 4. Emphasis supplied.

⁷² Thornton, 4.

⁷³ See Thornton, 4–5.

⁷⁴ Thornton, 5. Emphasis supplied.

Regarding the fiscal implications of NSC-68, especially the huge increase in defense spending it contemplated, David Halberstam has written that when “the Korean War began and the Cold War escalated into a hot war . . . the force of events had their own financial imperatives. The debate over NSC-68 had become academic, the issue overtaken by events. The budget, which NSC-68 suggested would have to triple, now tripled because of the war. Truman himself never had to make a decision on NSC-68. In fact, by the late fall of 1951 when the fiscal 1952 Pentagon budget was being prepared, it had quadrupled from \$13 billion in pre-Korean War days to \$55 billion. ‘Korea,’ Acheson would cynically note years later at a seminar at Princeton, ‘saved us.’” Halberstam, David, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, 201. Emphasis supplied.

⁷⁵ Thornton, 5. Emphasis supplied.

⁷⁶ “Realpolitik” is defined as “politics based on pragmatism or practicality rather than on ethical or theoretical considerations.” (*Encarta Dictionary*.)

⁷⁷ Thornton, 149. Emphasis supplied.

⁷⁸ Lt. Col. Appleman has written that in March 1950 “there were rumors of an impending invasion of South Korea and, in one week alone, 3–10 March, there occurred twenty-nine guerrilla attacks in South Korea and eighteen incidents along the [38th] Parallel. Beginning in May 1950 incidents along the Parallel, and guerilla activity in the interior, dropped off sharply. It was the lull preceding the storm.” Appleman, *South*, 6.

It was bad enough that the South Koreans were virtually defenseless on June 25, 1950. But even if the United States wanted to help the country that we had created, America was in no position to defend it at that time because of the military downsizing following World War II.

⁷⁹ This view is what Cohen and Gooch call blaming “the man in the dock”—namely, that a military failure can be attributable to a single, identifiable individual. Truman alone can no more be blamed for the North Korean invasion of South Korea than MacArthur alone can be blamed for the Chinese intervention several months later. See Cohen, Eliot M. and Gooch, John, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*.

⁸⁰ See Blair, 61.

⁸¹ Appleman, *South*, 16

⁸² Appleman, *South*, 17.

⁸³ Different names have been used to designate the North Korean Army, e.g., “Korean People’s Army” and “In Min Gun.” Throughout this Monograph the designation NKPA has been used, except in quotations or if the context requires a different name.

⁸⁴ During the Chinese civil war the Soviet Union sent North Korean troops to fight with Communist forces against the Nationalists.

⁸⁵ See Thornton, 87.

⁸⁶ Appleman, *South*, 18. Emphasis supplied.

⁸⁷ See James III, 412, quoting Roberts.

⁸⁸ I am inserting an author's note here on the subject of personal versus organizational blame, based on my own experience in Korea not long after the armistice was signed. I mentioned earlier that I was the chief CCF order of battle analyst for Eighth Army during 1955–1956, the early years of the armistice.

We obtained our intelligence from several sources, including Chinese Communist military defectors, North Korean military and civilian defectors, agents sent north by American and South Korean clandestine operators, and even individuals kidnapped from the North.

All of them had to be interrogated in their own languages.

Yet the interpreter-interrogation situation in Eighth Army's 528th Military Intelligence Company—the sole American MI company in all of South Korea—was scandalous. But who to blame? Let the reader be the judge. Here are the facts.

In the 1950s, Army enlistees who signed up for three years could opt to attend a military service school of their choice. Accordingly, many regulars who had to continue reenlisting every several years while working toward their twenty-or-more-year retirement pensions (as well as those who for other reasons, like avoiding the draft, enlisted for three years), chose the Army Language School in beautiful Monterey, California. There, for about one year of their three-year commitment, they would study a foreign language and then *supposedly* be assigned to a country whose language they *supposedly* had mastered. Especially in those days, Russian (which, without my having attended the Army Language School, is what got me into MI, and then to Korea), Korean, various Chinese dialects, and other languages.

That's how it was supposed to work. The reality was quite different.

In practice, the 528th Military Intelligence Company was a dumping ground for Army Language School graduates in Russian, Korean, and Chinese.

Once in Korea, the Monterey graduates were assigned to interrogate in the language they were *supposed* to know how to speak, principally Korean or Chinese. The problem, however, was that virtually every one of the Monterey graduates could not adequately speak either Korean or any Chinese dialect.

The Army's "solution" to the language problem was to hire English-speaking South Koreans, and Nationalist Chinese civilians from Taiwan, to interpret for the regular army enlisted and officer Monterey graduates, who were then supposed to conduct the interrogations.

The problem with this part of the Army's "solution," however, was that the Monterey graduates had never been trained as interrogators.

The Army's "solution" for the interrogation part of the problem was to use the untrained-as-interrogators South Korean and Chinese civilian linguists to conduct, in their native languages, the interrogations, while the Army Language School graduates looked on or performed other tasks in the 528th Military Intelligence Company.

Thus, in the context of the question addressed in this book, the necessary question arises: Who was to blame for second-rate interpreting, third-rate interrogating, and the resulting dubious order of battle and other intelligence obtained from the Chinese and North Koreans? The secretary of defense, secretary of the Army, Army chief of staff, Recruiting Command, Monterey enlistees, Army Language School, Eighth Army commanding general, his G-1 or G-2, the 528th Military Intelligence Company commander, chief of the interrogation section? All of whom doubtless believed that everyone who was supposed to be doing his job—interrogating in the language he was trained in—was actually doing it. Or was the failure an organizational one from top to bottom?

⁸⁹ Mackubin, Thomas Owens, "Anti-Defense Secretary," *The Weekly Standard*, January 28, 2013, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Dr. Campbell has noted that MacArthur's "staff, which included Willoughby, had shielded him before the outbreak of hostilities from evidence suggesting that Eighth Army's combat readiness was not adequate."