

## SECTION 1: SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE UPDATES

## 1A THE KOREAN WAR: QUO VADIS? THE ONGOING LEGACY OF THE KOREAN WAR AND QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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Throughout world history, as nations have risen and fallen, wars have been among the most important events. Wars serve as indispensable means for new powers and states but unavoidable realities for the defeated. For powers both new and old, however, wars have immense costs in human lives. Thus, we must find the positive outcomes and rationales, or new challenges, however ironic that may seem.

Long ago, the Peloponnesian War (B.C. 431–404) demonstrated the power of not only democratic governance in the Greek city states but also their alliance against the authoritarian and totalitarian system of Sparta. World Wars I and II saw the end of Western colonial imperialism, establishing what Immanuel Kant would have recognised as a ‘Pacific Union’ among Western democracies. The Vietnam War defeated American-backed French colonialism and triggered political and civic activism in the United States in the 1960s and ’70s. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ushered the globe into a new type of fanatic religious warfare, challenging us to consider the thousand-year-old issue of who is right within the current context of counter-terrorism.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KOREAN WAR FOR KOREA

But what were the by-products of the Korean War? Many epithets have been used, including ‘A sour little war’ by W. Averell Harriman and ‘police action’ by Harry S. Truman. The Republicans called it ‘the foreign policy blunder of the century’. General Omar Bradley called it ‘Frankly, a great military disaster’ (Goulden, 1982, p. xiii). More broadly, it has been described as a template of Cold War conflict, a starting point for bipolar Cold War international politics between the US and the Soviet Union and, most famously, ‘the forgotten war’. Critically, though, it is the longest of wars in

the twentieth century, as the 1953 Armistice was never officially replaced by a peace treaty, leading to dire situations of international importance such as North Korea’s nuclear provocations and the Sino–US collision course.



*The present-day border between North and South Korea. The war never officially ended, and the border is a tense and heavily fortified area still.*

This ongoing war has also dramatically impacted the destinies of the two Koreas: North Korea, isolated, totalitarian and hunger-stricken, versus South Korea, dramatically transformed from aid-receiving to aid-offering, with the most dynamic democracy. What could have caused such a stark contrast between these regimes, despite having shared the same history, culture and political system for millennia before separation in 1948, three years before the Korean War?

How can we explain such disparities between these two groups of people, separated from each other only by international powers and ideological competition? The past 70 years have marked a watershed, completely shifting the courses of these separated but related nations. Korea has continuously maintained national identity through the Three Kingdoms, Goguryeo (B.C. 37–668), Baekjae (B.C. 18–660), Silla (B.C. 57–935), Goryeo (918–1392) and the Joseon periods (1392–1910), with a recorded history of five millennia.

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Since the early seventh century, the Korean nation had maintained a homogeneous identity, culture and political community. The Joseon dynasty, in particular, was tightly controlled and centralised, with rule of law, a constitution and a standing army. It was one of the longest dynasties, running 518 years, just slightly shorter than the 844-year Holy Roman Empire (962–1806), the 790-year Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC) in China, and the 724-year Ottoman Empire (1299–1923). Considering that this political community thrived as one nation for thousands of years, contemporary division, confrontations and discrepancies between the two Koreas stand out in two ways: the division of a Korean nation into two may be temporary, yet the current impasse between the two Koreas with superpowers like China and the United States is also unprecedented in Korean history. In fact, South Korea's post-Korean War rebirth is unprecedented in the whole history of Korea.

## THE KOREAN WAR AS PART OF A GLOBAL POWER STRUGGLE

In fact, the Korean War was the first major war to occur in the context of the bipolar Cold War system, with North Korea as the first state after World War II to invade and seek the annexation of another (Clemens Jr., 2016, p. 7). It was not only a Korean civil war between North and South but also the first major collision between the US-led alliance of UN forces and the alliance of newly communist China and the Soviet Union. Many Korean War veterans interviewed by the Korean War Legacy Foundation ([www.kwvdm.org](http://www.kwvdm.org); [www.koreanwarlegacy.org](http://www.koreanwarlegacy.org)) clearly recall encountering no North Korean soldiers after the Korean War entered stalemate trench warfare in 1951. To these UN veterans, their Korean War enemies were Chinese, in the absence of Russia, in most cases.

Another important historical fact that we need to be aware of with regard to the legacy of the Korean War is that it was not Japan, the Axis Power, that divided Korea. This was carried out by the United States and the Soviet Union, tacitly backed by other powers at the end of World War II. The principle of dividing Germany was not applied to Japan. Instead, it was the Korean Peninsula, which was

the victim of Japanese colonial occupancy, that was divided. Korean interests and voices were completely ignored and disregarded, if not disdained. According to Fry (2013), future US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, then a colonel on General George Marshall's staff, and fellow Army staffer Colonel Charles 'Tic' Bonesteel were assigned with identifying a line of control that both the USA and the Soviets could agree to. Time was of the essence: the Soviets had just entered the war against Japan, and American officials were worried that they would rush in to occupy the entire Korean Peninsula before the USA, whose nearest troops were still 600 miles (966 kilometres) away on Okinawa, could establish its own presence on the mainland. Rusk knew that the 38th parallel 'made no sense economically or geographically' – Korea, in fact, had enjoyed unity and a high degree of geographic continuity for the better part of a millennium – but this was now the Cold War. Military expediency had to rule the day. Korea, it was thought, would be divided only temporarily. Rusk later recalled the experience in his 1991 memoir, *As I Saw It*:

*'During a meeting on August 14, 1945, the same day as the Japanese surrender, [Bonesteel] and I retired to an adjacent room late at night and studied intently a map of the Korean peninsula. Working in haste and under great pressure, we had a formidable task: to pick a zone for the American occupation. Neither Tic nor I was a Korea expert, but it seemed to us that Seoul, the capital, should be in the American sector. We also knew that the U.S. Army opposed an extensive area of occupation. Using a National Geographic map, we looked just north of Seoul for a convenient dividing line but could not find a natural geographical line. We saw instead the thirty-eighth parallel and decided to recommend that... [Our commanders] accepted it without too much haggling, and surprisingly, so did the Soviets.'*

It is almost ridiculous to learn that this was how a nation's destiny was determined. Two US colonels were ordered to find the most convenient line of permanent division of a nation in a hurry, completely ignoring its opinion, and that line still exists, halving the whole Korean nation.

The legacy of this division remains with us today. China's challenge to US-led Western influence in

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contemporary international politics centres on North Korea's nuclear provocations and China's expansionist policies. These exemplify the power struggles that have stemmed from the unfinished war in the Korean Peninsula. They fought not just for their proxies but for themselves. When MacArthur ordered UN forces to march north of the 38th parallel and Yalu River, which marks China's north-east border with North Korea, the People's Republic of China (PRC) feared pressure from US and UN forces. The US and the UK did not want to spark another world-scale war by colliding with the second-largest communist country backed by the Soviet Union so soon after World War II. The UK government, in particular, vehemently opposed General MacArthur's idea of nuclear bombing Manchuria. The stalemate since 1951 in the Korean War ended with an armistice in 1953, signed by China, North Korea and the United Nations. The division of Korea cannot be overcome unless these two poles reach an accord and put war behind them. This unbearable legacy of the Korean War may be the most convincing reason why the Western world has not wanted to break the status quo in the Korean Peninsula – it would necessarily involve North Korea being backed by China and rectify the conventional policy of regime denial.

## KOREA AND THE KOREAN WAR'S PLACE IN THE ONGOING CONFLICT BETWEEN THE USA AND CHINA

Can there be an end to history? This is a legitimate question as we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War in 2020 and the 70th anniversary of the Armistice in 2023, ending the Korean War with a ceasefire that has never been replaced with a peace treaty. Francis Fukuyama, in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, argues that the fall of the Soviet Union and the consequential end of the Cold War indicates that political and economic systems cannot evolve further, concluding that our era is 'not just... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government' (1989). Does this argument hold, though, when Korea is still technically at war and China challenges US



hegemony in the South China Sea with its One Belt and One Road Initiative to spread Chinese economic and cultural influence?

*A South Korean poster from 1952 trying to persuade North Korean troops to surrender*

Will the current encounter between Washington and Pyongyang mark the end of the evolutionary process of the Korean War? The current state of the US–North Korea conflict, centring around Pyongyang's provocative nuclear missile test, poses a threat not only to countries near the Peninsula but also to global peace and stability.

Unfortunately, the 70-year-old rivalry between China and the USA has never been resolved. In fact, China is determined to replace US hegemony and rise beyond Western influence. *South China Morning Post* sees the current bilateral trade war with the USA as not just 'a mighty tussle over imports and exports' but 'pitting China against a coterie of Western nations that see it as the gravest threat to their dominance of the existing world order... On the one side, there is the clear goal of slowing down China's seemingly inexorable rise as a superpower. And on the other side is China's determination not to bow to the collective might of the West and forfeit the right to decide its own destiny.' (Fong, 2018) However politically and parochially oriented this remark may seem, the current trade war between the United States and China is no surprise in this historical context. Since the Korean War and up to the moment at which China became the world's second-largest economy, this collision course was expected, and even recognised during the Obama administration in his 'pivot to Asia' policy. Chinese government and pro-communist intellectuals blame the USA for this trade dispute and hegemonic competition in the South China Sea and Taiwan. Wei (2019) claims

that 'Washington started to regard Beijing as its strategic rival. Before 2010, the US did not believe China's national strength could pose a threat to it, nor did it think China was a challenge to the US-led international order.'

Such attitudes and words become a trend.

The recently created mouthpiece of the Chinese government, *The Global Times*, wrote an article in which China Central TV (CCTV) reshuffled the broadcasting schedule to suddenly insert movies on the Korean War.<sup>1</sup> From Thursday 16 May 16 to Saturday 18 May 2019, China's state television aired three classic Chinese films featuring the heroic roles of the Chinese army in the Korean War, replacing the previously scheduled programmes and prompting wide discussions online amid the simmering China–US trade war. CCTV's movie channel CCTV-6 said on its Weibo on Thursday night that the war classic *Heroic Sons and Daughters* would be aired at 8:25 pm, and the previously scheduled programme of the Asian Film and TV Week would be shown at 10:20 pm. Later, the channel said that it would screen another military film, *Battle on Shangganling Mountain*, depicting a major battle in North Korea, on Friday night. A third classic film, *A Surprise Attack*, was aired on Saturday, replacing the scheduled comedy. All three films featured the war against US aggression and to aid [North] Korea, as it is known in China. (*Global Times*, 2019) The second film in particular was commissioned by Chairman Mao in 1956. The Chinese see the Korean War, in which they fought for the first time against Americans, as the start of their long battle with the United States (Goulden, 1982), and it is still ongoing. Renping (2019) wrote that the current intensifying trade war with the United States recalls the Korean War, saying:

*'The war lasted over three years, and in the later two years of fighting and talking, our persistence on the battlefield and the continuing gains eventually forced the Americans to bow their heads at the negotiating table. Looking at the current arrogance of the American elites toward a strategic crackdown on China, it's clear that we face a long and almost determined and protracted war regardless of the progress of the trade talks. Regardless of whether a trade deal is signed or not, this game is inevitable.'*

*We must carry forward the spirit of the battle on Shangganling Mountain. A trade war is a great game in which we need to create and unleash our vitality while maintaining our position and crush the will of the other side with China's growing economic strength.'*

Sheng (2019) explains why these unscheduled Korean War movies were aired so abruptly. Sheng said that 'it would broadcast a documentary about the 1950 Battle of Chosin [Jangjin in Korean] Reservoir, an important battle in the war that marks the complete withdrawal of US-led UN troops from North Korea'. He adds that 'because of the demand from the audiences', the channel decided to broadcast China-produced movies on the Korean War. 'We are using movies to echo the current era,' CCTV-6 said on its Weibo. 'We are not afraid of the US, not in the past, not today.'

All the current coverage on the trade war between the USA and China corroborates research on how the Korean War has shaped the negative narratives of China's policy and attitudes with the United States. Gries, Prewitt-Freilino, Cox-Fuenzalida and Zhang (2009, p. 437) conducted an experimental case study on how 'the valence, source, and nation of historical accounts of the Korean War affect Chinese and US students' beliefs about this shared past, emotions, national self-esteem, and threat perception in the present'. This article seemingly validates a journalist's view on the current trade war and its similarity to the Korean War.

## THE POTENT LEGACY OF THE WAR FOR CHINA

Gries et al. (2009) argue that the unfortunate past between the USA and China still haunts contemporary bilateral affairs, best exemplified by the Korean War. They find that 'while most Americans have largely forgotten the war, many Chinese not only remember it but also draw pride and strength from that memory. This fortuitous asymmetry of historical relevance mitigates the impact that contending Korean War histories have on US–China relations today... When both parties to a shared contentious past link that past to their self-understandings in the present, there is little room for compromise.' (Gries et al., 2009, p. 455) As we find from abundant evidence

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<sup>1</sup> The Medium *Global Times*, where these articles appeared, was created by the Chinese government. With more than 600 million Internet users, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for proactive and effective Communist Party-led responses to a changing media environment. Speelman (2015) writes 'Enter the Paper, or Pengpai in Chinese, a web-based media outlet headquartered in Shanghai promising to provide news on "politics and thought" and one of the most successful answers to Xi's call thus far.'

on how Chinese digital media depicts the current trade friction with the USA, the Korean War represents a deep wound and, simultaneously, a lesson in Chinese relations with the United States; Gries et al. (2009) argue that contemporary affairs are shaped by conflicts about the past. They claim further that ‘Chinese nationalism today is closely tied up with narratives of China’s past victimization at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialism, and that nationalism has an impact on China’s foreign policies in general and US policy in particular.’ (Gries et al., 2009, p. 434)

Even before the current trade conflicts, metaphors and direct references to the Korean War have apparently been used in different contexts. Gries et al. (2009) highlight *The People’s Daily’s* reference to the ‘Korean battleground’ as noteworthy. The CCP (Communist Party of China) has long claimed nationalist legitimacy, partly based on a nationalist narrative in which the CCP led a righteous effort to aid the Korean people and expel the invading US forces from Chinese and Korean soil. Indeed, it has been argued (Gries, 2004, pp. 56–61) that, in Chinese nationalist narratives, “victory” over the US in Korea marks the end of the “Century of Humiliation” and thus remains central to both the collective self-esteem of many Chinese nationalists as well as the legitimacy of the CCP today’ (Gries et al., 2009, p. 434). China sees the Korean War as a way to recover from the humiliation of bowing to Western and Japanese imperialism. This is why the Korean War has resurfaced whenever China faces problems with countries that insult its self-respect.

Gries et al.’s (2009) comparative analyses of high school history textbooks in both countries indicates that the ill-fated past has shaped current frictions between the USA and China.

*‘Current textbooks continue to refer to the United States as the “enemy” (in Chinese, diren), suggesting that the United States intervened in the “domestic affairs” of Korea without provocation. No mention is made of the North Korean invasion of South Korea. When MacArthur’s armies headed toward the Yalu River, the Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV) drove the “invaders” (qinluezhe) back to the thirty-eighth parallel, where they were forced to sign the armistice. The CPV had “won”*

*(shengli), and the United States had “lost” (shibai). By contrast, US history textbooks tend to treat Korea as the “Forgotten War.” Compared to their much more extensive treatment of the “good war” against German and Japanese fascism during World War II, US textbook treatment of the Korean War is brief. For instance, the 1991 eighth edition of the popular McGraw-Hill textbook American History: A Survey devotes thirty pages to World War II but just three to the Korean War. The account begins with the North Korean “invasion” of the South, followed by US intervention to “assist” the overwhelmed South Korean army against “communist forces.” It concludes rather ambiguously with a “protracted stalemate” back at the thirty-eighth parallel where it had all started (see Brinkley et al. 1991, 844–846). There is no discussion of either victory or defeat.’ (Gries et al., 2009, pp. 435–6)*

Based on this study, the Korean War has clearly not ended, at least in the context of contemporary Sino–US collisions in East Asia. The Korean War appears to be a living organ, constantly reminding us of the similar problems that caused the US-led UN forces and the Russian-led communist forces to collide. Thus, in this context, neither the Cold War nor history has really ended, but the unresolved scar has frequently resurfaced and produced new problems. In fact, North Korea’s nuclear proliferation drove the parties involved to a dead end in 2018 and 2019, to North Korea’s seventh nuclear and ICBM tests, and to the USA’s consideration of a ‘bloody nose’ attack, a limited

*Chinese poster from the Korean War. This imagery is constantly drawn on by modern Chinese leaders*



strike on a missile launch site or other target. South Koreans had to worry about another Korean War before the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

China's ambition to rise above the only hegemon, the United States, has been clear in its bold One Belt and One Road Initiative (BRI), declared in the APEC Summit in 2014. Essentially, China wants to revive its heyday of economic power by tying the whole world together on both land and sea. Ironically, the Maritime Silk Road exactly overlaps with the Acheson Line, whose declaration on 12 January 1950 inadvertently compelled Stalin to allow Kim Il-Sung to attack South Korea.

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carriers to the South China Sea in the near future, into one of the busiest commercial sea routes, carrying \$5 trillion worth of trade a year. Britain's defence minister Gavin Williamson in 2018 made it clear that the presence of its Royal Navy in Asia was no 'flash in the pan' but 'a permanent presence' to enforce the triangle alliance among the USA, Japan and Great Britain. History does not end but repeats this triangle that defeated Russian expansionism on the Korean Peninsula in the early twentieth century. This time, however, their potential threat is China.

The Korean War continues to exemplify the most important values in the history of human society: individual freedom and open transparency in our economy and democracy. As the second-largest presence in the Korean War, Great Britain has played an integral role in what the Korean War has accomplished. The outcomes of the Korean War are threefold: 1) South Korea survived and became a world economic power with a substantive democracy; 2) North Korea remained isolationist and has not changed its antagonistic policy towards the free world; and 3) the status quo among the superpowers on the Korean question has not changed significantly. The ultimate questions are whether the war has finished its due course and whether the USA and North Korea will reach resolution or wage war. The key to this issue is China, which was the main enemy against the UN forces and one of the three signatories of the ceasefire in 1953, which has remained unchanged for the last 68 years. Will the twenty-first century see the end of the Korean War, replacing this ceasefire with a peace treaty and a resolution to the current stalemate and confrontations between the free world and North Korea, as well as China?

## QUO VADIS?

History never ends, but the Korean War has constantly reproduced further and unresolved confrontations among the parties of the war and threatened regional peace and prosperity. This is why the British government's policy of 'Global Britain' puts enormous emphasis on the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea in order to maintain the rule-based international order and contain China's One Belt and One Road Initiative. It is noteworthy that one of Britain's amphibious transport vessels, the HMS *Albion*, which deployed to Asian waters in 2018–19, conducted a freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) en route to Vietnam, contesting China's claim to sovereignty over the Paracels in 1974. The main mission of these five Royal Navy vessels was to deter Chinese provocations to high-seas freedoms in the South China Sea by conducting naval drills with the USA, Japan and the Five Powers Defence Arrangements (FPDA) allies – Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. Both Britain's foreign and defence ministers made it clear that the UK would deploy two aircraft

# 1B THE LEGACY OF THE KOREAN WAR

Gregg A. Brazinsky

The Korean War was a crucible that irrevocably changed Korea and the world. Its brutal fighting, massive destruction and indeterminate conclusion left a complex legacy for all the nations that fought in it. Americans and Europeans have often called it the ‘forgotten war’ because it never seemed to offer a clear lesson. In Korea, however, the war can never be forgotten because so many aspects of contemporary politics, economy and society bear its imprint.

## FORGETTING A WAR THAT MUST BE REMEMBERED

Perhaps the main reason why many NATO countries have termed the Korean War the ‘forgotten war’ is because they are not really sure how it should be remembered. It did not end with a resounding victory over adversaries who were intent on world conquest, as World War II did. Nor did it lead to a humiliating defeat in a struggle whose very morality many questioned, as did the Vietnam War. In fact, the Korean War never really ended. Fighting stopped on 27 July 1953, when representatives of the UN Command, the Chinese People’s Volunteers and the North Korean People’s Army signed an armistice, but to this date, there has been no official peace treaty between the combatants.

While many have found little to celebrate or mourn about the war, the fact is that it reshaped the Cold War. The war strengthened the Free World’s determination to contain communism in Asia. In 1952, the Allied Powers signed the Treaty of San Francisco with Japan, formally ending World War II and ending the US occupation of Japan. The treaty left Japan in the hands of politicians who were considered reliable conservatives, while keeping 200,000 American troops stationed at 2,000 base facilities on the Japanese main islands (Immerwahr, 2019). Within one year of the Armistice, the United States had signed mutual security treaties with both South Korea and Taiwan, indefinitely committing itself to the defence of these anti-communist allies. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan became outposts of

American influence in the Pacific and took on a new value to the United States and its allies.

The Korean War also contributed significantly to the militarisation of the Cold War in Europe. In April 1950, the US National Security Council had produced a policy paper known as NSC-68, which called for the build-up of sufficient military power to prevent communist domination of the Eurasian land mass. By 1951, the Truman administration had moved significantly towards implementing the document’s recommendations, and American military power was almost double what it had been in 1949. European military power also grew dramatically. When the Korean War began, NATO countries had only 14 army divisions and spent approximately 5.5% of their GDP on the military. By the time the war ended, NATO had 15 divisions stationed in West Germany alone, and NATO countries spent more than 12% of their GDP on defence (Stueck, 1995).

Finally, the connection between the Korean War and the domestic politics in Great Britain and the United States must not be overlooked. A wave of domestic political repression swept both the United States and Europe over the course of the war. America’s second Red Scare had already begun before June 1950, but it unquestionably reached new heights during the Korean War.

Its rise was fuelled in part by growing hostility towards communist China. Moreover, the war strengthened the hand of the notorious Republican senator from Wisconsin Joseph McCarthy and his allies in the United States. During the war, Congress passed the McCarran Act over President Truman’s veto. The act required all members of the Communist Party in the United States to register with the Attorney General. The government would no longer employ anyone with records of affiliation with the party. And of course, McCarthyism went far beyond the federal government. It sought to root communists and suspected communists out of nearly all sectors of American life – schools, universities, the entertainment industry and

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*A Korean civilian salvaging materials amid the rubble-strewn streets of Seoul in 1950*

numerous others (Stueck, 2002). In Great Britain, the new paranoia about communism manifested itself in strong new efforts to curb Labour activism. When the Transport Workers' Union went on strike in the autumn of 1950, it was fiercely criticised as a communist tool, and workers saw little choice but to go back to work (Masuda, 2015). The Korean War did not in and of itself create this wave of anti-leftist repression. The responsibility for that lies in the hands of manipulative and self-interested politicians and the thousands of paranoid people who believed them. Yet the war created a context in which these ideas could flourish.

Outside of Korea itself, the Korean War has never occupied a space in historical memory that is proportionate to its political and social influence. Koreans, however, do not have the luxury of forgetting the war. It has left their country permanently divided and has kept families separated from each other for decades. Seventy-five years later, out of the wreckage of the war have emerged two very different Korean states. The first, in the north, became a failed socialist utopia. But South Korea stands out as one of the few post-colonial states to emerge as a prosperous democracy, and the war has influenced this process. The war's legacy in South Korea has fascinated historians because it is as remarkable as it is contradictory. It has left the country impoverished yet in some ways it paved the way for an economic 'miracle on the Han'. It has left an anti-communist dictatorship in place but also induced some of the changes that would undergird South Korea's long struggle for democracy.

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## THE KOREAN WAR AND SOUTH KOREA'S ECONOMIC MIRACLE

By the signing of the Armistice in 1953, South Korea had been reduced to smouldering rubble, but its people stood resilient. There were shortages of everything and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis were widespread. Its industries were wiped out, along with a substantial portion of its infrastructure. There were few schools or universities still standing and more than 600,000 homes had been destroyed by bombs and artillery. More than five million people – roughly a quarter of the population – were without suitable homes by the time the fighting stopped. Americans estimated that the total damage to South Korea's infrastructure was around \$3 billion, a staggering sum for a country that had struggled economically even before the war began. Yet within a generation, South Korea would emerge as one of the 'Asian tiger' economies and amaze the world with its technological prowess. Some of the cornerstones for this rapid growth were laid during the war.

Even as the war wrought massive destruction, it also led to the construction of some new infrastructure that would later play an important role in South Korea's development. UN forces in South Korea needed supplies and they needed a way to transport them within the Korean Peninsula. The activities of US Army engineers in the south-eastern port city of Busan had a transformative effect. They expanded the city's piers and wharfs, constructed new storage facilities and laid oil pipelines (Chung, 2019). Once weapons and supplies arrived in Busan, the UN Command needed to move them rapidly to troops on the front-lines, but they found that South Korea's transport capacity was inadequate. Army engineers expanded and standardised the South Korean rail network, which became the most important part of the supply chain, and they paved roads so that more trucks could be used (Chung, 2019). In total, the United States spent more than \$117 million on improving South Korea's transportation infrastructure during the war (Chung, 2019).



These investments had two enduring effects. First, they enabled Busan to emerge as a leading container port by the 1960s and a major centre of South Korea's economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s. Second, during the war, a number of important South Korean companies seized the opportunity presented by working with the Eighth Army. Hyundai was perhaps the most famous example of this. Jeong Juyeong, the founder of the company, later explained that learning American construction processes and gaining access to American equipment was critical to Hyundai's future emergence as a global conglomerate (Chung, 2019). Paradoxically, the war left South Korea devastated but also bequeathed it with some of the infrastructure and technical knowledge that would help to propel the economy forward in future decades.

Despite this new infrastructure, South Korea needed a great deal of assistance during the period immediately after the war. Without a massive infusion of aid from the United States, it is highly questionable whether Syngman Rhee's government would have survived. These aid programmes were underway even before the war ended. American assistance to South Korea ranged between \$200 million and \$300 million per year during the 1950s – more on average than any other country in the world at the time. It included food aid, the construction of new power and fertiliser plants, the paving of thousands of roads, and assistance in further improving railroads and other parts of the transportation infrastructure (Brazinsky, 2007). Yet these ambitious aid programmes produced only modest economic growth rates. The problem was that South Korea's leadership needed to play a constructive and active role, and Syngman Rhee never really did that. His government was corrupt and wasteful and tended to divert American aid funds to projects that would strengthen its grip on power rather than promote rapid development. The real driving force behind South Korea's rapid development was another important legacy of the war: the rise of the military.

One of the most enduring and important effects of the war on South Korean society was the militarisation of society. The war necessitated the

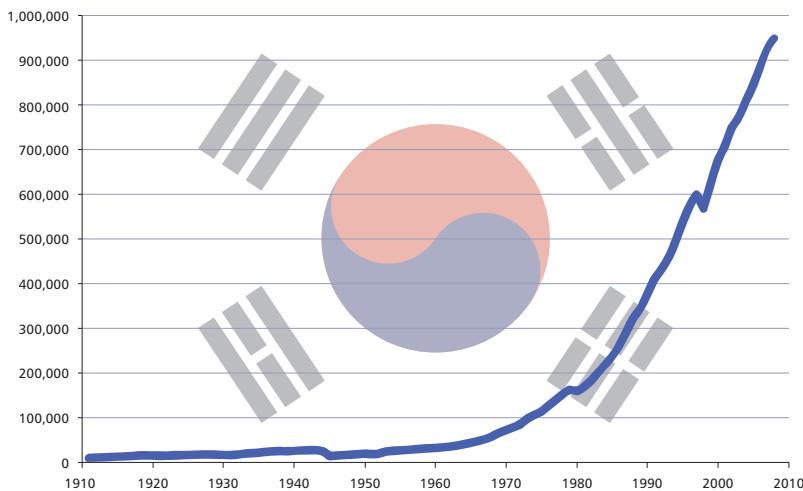
development of a powerful military, which came to play a dominating role in the country. During the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), Korea had not even been allowed to have its own army, although some Koreans served in the Japanese military, both voluntarily and, in most cases, involuntarily through conscription. When North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel in June 1950, the South Korean Army stood at 100,000 troops – a relatively large force in relation to the country's population but still relatively small in comparison to where it would stand at the end of the war. The Korea Military Advisory Group (KMAG) was a US military unit charged with the task of strengthening and training the Republic of Korea (ROK) military during the war. With UN forces under constant pressure from Chinese and North Korean troops, KMAG's work was urgent. Through the rapid training of South Korean recruits under KMAG's supervision, the ROK Army grew to 242,000 troops by December 1950 and 492,000 by the signing of the Armistice in 1953 (Brazinsky, 2007).

After the war, the US and the ROK government agreed to further expand the army to over 700,000 troops. But what made the military such an important force was not only its size but also the level of training of its officers. KMAG created a special system of schools that trained elite South Korean military officers in logistics, communications and administration. Moreover, after the war, South Korean soldiers were frequently deployed to work on reconstruction projects such as paving roads and building schools. The ultimate result was a vast organisation with a nationalistic officer corps with administrative expertise that was far greater than any group in the civilian sector.

In May 1961, a military junta led by Major General Park Chung-hee and his allies launched a *coup d'état*. The junta's experience in the military had bequeathed its leadership with both the vision and the capabilities to promote rapid economic development in South Korea. At the same time, the economic model that Park created was not solely a product of foreign tutelage. Park heeded American demands that South Korea increase exports but he did not achieve this through the

... within a generation, South Korea would emerge as one of the 'Asian tiger' economies and amaze the world with its technological prowess. Some of the cornerstones for this rapid growth were laid during the war. ☺

kind of free market system that prevailed in the United States. He created a model of growth in which the government maintained tight links to a select group of preferred companies. These companies received low-interest loans and preferential treatment from the state and, in return, helped to fund Park's political party. This kind of state-led development was influenced by Germany, Japan and Taiwan, but the South Korean model had its own distinctive characteristics. Ultimately, the model was highly effective at spurring rapid economic change. GDP growth had been modest at best during the 1950s, but during the 1960s and 1970s it averaged over 10% annually.



GDP of South Korea, 1950–2010

Park remained in power until his assassination in 1979, and though he allowed several elections (in which he won the presidency and his party dominated the National Assembly) during the 1960s, his government always maintained strict limits on civil liberties. But even if South Korea under Park was an autocracy, it was a developmental autocracy. It built institutions, fostered the rise of a new middle class, invested in education and implemented other policies that laid the basis for the vibrant democratic society that would emerge by the end of the twentieth century. But while Park's development state might have laid the socio-economic basis for democracy, it did not create the popular desire for it. Ultimately, democracy would only be won in South Korea through years of struggle and protests. This struggle too had some of its roots in South Korea's experience of war.

## THE KOREAN WAR AND SOUTH KOREAN DEMOCRACY

When the Armistice was signed, South Korea was scarcely the embodiment of the Free World ideals that UN forces had purportedly fought for. In fact, Syngman Rhee had used the emergency of wartime to tighten his grip on power – at least temporarily. In 1952, he forced the National Assembly to alter the constitution so that he could seek another term as president through direct election. Rhee was also able to build up indigenous security forces during the war and gained a powerful tool for suppressing dissent.

Even while the government became more repressive, some important seeds of democracy were planted in South Korea during the war. It would take decades for these to fully blossom and they needed to be nourished by the blood and suffering of many South Koreans, but in their absence, the ROK's political development might have taken a very different route. Despite the myriad of hardships brought on by the war, South Koreans could never completely ignore the kind of country that they hoped to build.

It was during the Korean War that international relief agencies began working together with South Koreans to rebuild the country's education system. Education had long been greatly valued in Korea as a means of gaining status and power (Seth, 2002). Neo-Confucian ideals that were prevalent during the Joseon dynasty had also stressed education as a means of self-cultivation. Under Japanese colonialism, much of the curriculum had focused on turning Koreans into loyal subjects of the empire. The imperial government forced Korean schoolchildren to learn Japanese and adopt Japanese names. The US occupation had reformed the curriculum and expanded the education system to some degree, but the outbreak of the war had forced a suspension of schooling as many school buildings were destroyed or used to house UN forces. In the midst of this chaos, the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), whose main task was to help South Korea recover from the ravages of war, launched an expansive programme

to rebuild the Korean education system. It spent millions of dollars on new schools and dispatched a team of curriculum experts, who it charged with the task of revising the curriculum. During the years after the war, American assistance agencies supplemented these programmes with new ones that brought leading South Korean teachers and educators to the United States, where they could learn about the American school system first-hand (Brazinsky, 2007). With this assistance, the South Korean school system expanded dramatically during the 1950s. The number of students attending high school grew from 59,000 to 275,000, while those attending colleges and universities quadrupled to 140,000 (Brazinsky, 2007). These students would in turn become a critically important political force.

Student and intellectual dissent had a long history in Korea. During the Joseon era, scholars saw it as their moral duty to criticise the king when wrongdoing was perceived. This tradition persisted in a slightly different form during the colonial period, when many anti-Japanese protests were student-led. By the late 1950s, students and intellectuals were once again taking up the mantle of righteous dissent. It was a student-led revolution that finally toppled Syngman Rhee's government in 1960. Although the democratic government that took its place barely lasted a year, students would remain an important source of protest throughout the Park Chung-hee era. Finally, student protests were at the heart of the South Korean democratic movement during the 1980s. At that time, a new and highly unpopular military clique, led by Chun Doo-hwan, had seized power. More than any other group, it was students who took to the streets to protest military rule and it was often student dissidents who bore the brunt of the regime's violent efforts to suppress dissent. Student activists also moved into factories to mobilise protests by workers during the 1970s and 1980s. The intent of building up South Korea's school system had never been specifically to foment student protests. It had nonetheless created an important social group that was deeply committed to democratic change and willing to fight for it.

The Korean War was an important incubator for South Korean arts and culture, and these too would

be important to the emergence of a democratic society. The war's influence on the film industry was particularly important. According to Christina Klein, 'The Korean War cleared a space, literally and figuratively for the production of a distinctive postwar film culture.' (2019, p. 14) It destroyed what was left of the colonial-era film production system and brought South Korean filmmakers into greater contact with Western techniques and materials. A number of filmmakers who would become important during the 1950s and 1960s gained significant experience working with the United States Information Agency producing propaganda films. The South Korean motion picture industry produced only 18 films in 1954 but the number had already grown to 111 by 1959 (Klein, 2019). Other cultural and intellectual endeavours achieved similar growth, in part due to American assistance. During the war, the US Embassy in Seoul first began supporting South Korean publication by providing newsprint – a scarce commodity in war-torn Korea – or other supplies. This continued during the 1950s, when American funds supported journals such as *Sasanggye* ('World of Thought') that challenged the authoritarianism of the South Korean government. The State Department supplemented these efforts through the so-called 'Leader Program', which brought important intellectuals, opinion-shapers and democratic-minded political leaders to the United States (Brazinsky, 2007).

South Korea's burgeoning popular culture would become another important force behind its eventual democratisation. Although the state could censor some publications and control some cultural production, it could never completely prevent dissenting ideas from being expressed when such heterogeneous cultural media existed. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, artists and intellectuals such as the poet Kim Chi-ha would become powerful voices against authoritarianism, and their writing would inspire many to join pro-democracy protests. Many political figures who participated in the Leader Program during the 1950s would become important leaders in South Korea's democratisation movement during the 1980s. Two participants in particular, Kim Young-

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South Korean election posters, 2007

sam and Kim Dae-jung, would become not only important democracy activists during the 1980s but also future presidents of the Republic of Korea after authoritarian rule ended.

Today South Korea is a prosperous democracy. Since 1987, when Chun Doo-hwan agreed to allow an open presidential election, South Korea has generally moved towards greater accountability for elected officials, more freedom and greater transparency. Of course, South Korea's institutions are not perfect and it still needs to achieve greater social equality, reduce corruption and eliminate some longstanding constraints on freedom of information and expression. But 75 years after the Korean War began, South Korea has become a prosperous democracy with tremendous soft power and a cutting-edge technology industry. Few could have envisioned such a success story at the time at which the Korean War began, and yet the legacy of the war is deeply infused into almost every part of this story.

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# 1C SITUATING THE KOREAN WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COLD WAR AND BRITISH COLD WAR POLICIES

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Korea in 1950 was when the Cold War turned hot. It was a dangerous period, during which one of the superpowers seriously considered the first use of nuclear weapons against the forces of a communist power and might have precipitated a third world war. The Korean War also drew in the United Kingdom against its strategic national interests at the time; but it also gave the British the opportunity to influence Washington's policy, usually advocating restraint to localise the conflict.

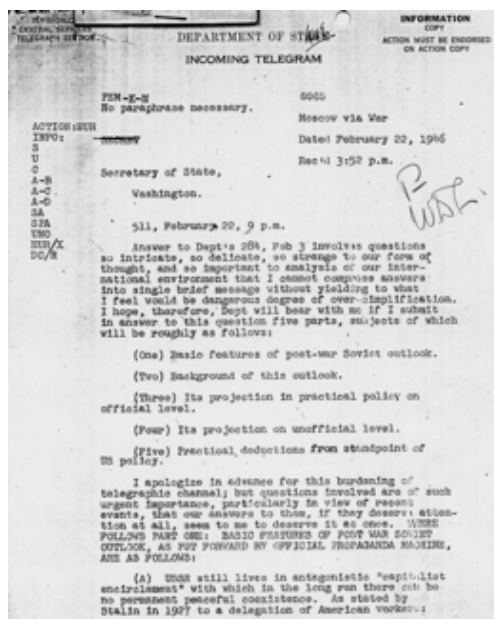
## THE CONTEXT FOR THE USA – THE END OF KENNANITE CONTAINMENT

The war also witnessed the manifest abandonment of the original strategy of 'containment' towards the perceived threat of Soviet expansionism, transforming the policy from a limited one into a wider geopolitical pushback against communism. Up to the outbreak of the war, the central figure in defining American foreign policy towards the Soviet Union was a career diplomat, and historian of Russia, George Kennan. Based in the American embassy in Moscow, Kennan found himself in a unique position to shape the State Department's thinking when, during the ambassador's absence through illness, he seized the opportunity to dispatch his assessment of Soviet policy. This was the Long Telegram, which arrived in Washington on 22 February 1946. (Gaddis, 1982, 2005; Kennan, 1967; Greenwood, 1990).

Kennanite containment of the Soviet Union evolved in the author's mind from 1946 to 1948. It encapsulated a series of fundamental principles that Kennan believed must guide American policy towards Moscow. The first proposition was that co-operation with the USSR was both unattainable and undesirable. The Soviets were expansionist, for sure, but this was through their sense of insecurity (particularly given their experience of the sudden Nazi attack in 1941) and not through an ideological commitment to communist conquest. Kennan emphasised that, to contain the Soviets,

it was essential to realise that the United States had finite resources and means to resist any communist expansion by Moscow. The 'ends' (containment) must fit the 'means' (resources) to attain Washington's strategic aim. The United States could not be a 'world policeman'.

When Kennan looked around the globe, he saw a hierarchy of US interests that must be protected before anything else. He boiled this hierarchy of interest down to five vital power centres. These were the United States, Great Britain, Germany and western central Europe, the USSR and Japan. Significantly, from the point of view of this publication, Kennan did not include Korea in this defensive perimeter. It was Kennan's firm belief that the Soviet Union would use all means short of war to expand – political, diplomatic and economic methods. The American response – if containment was to work – had to be to match like with like, i.e. the full use of American political, diplomatic and economic responses. And the joker that Washington could play, if the Soviets were considering military expansion, was the American atomic monopoly, which Kennan believed would be sufficient as a deterrent to Moscow (Gaddis, 1982, 2005; Kennan, 1967).



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The opening page of George Kennan's Long Telegram

Washington's assessment no longer entertained any notion that the Russians were confused or crudely reactive; instead, interpretations and assessments from this point on derived from the axiomatic construct that the Soviets were not a great power operating within the international system but rather a world revolution estate bent on overturning that system.

Soviet interventions in Iran, the Berlin airlift, the Greek civil war and threats to Turkey created a shift in American thinking, given coherence by Kennan's timely telegram. Its arrival in the State Department meant, as Daniel Yergin argues, that the official American view of Russia was no longer ambiguous. Washington's assessment 'no longer entertained any notion that the Russians were confused or crudely reactive; instead, interpretations and assessments from this point on derived from the axiomatic construct that the Soviets were not a great power operating within the international system but rather a world revolution estate bent on overturning that system.' (Yergin, 1977, p. 235)

When President Truman ordered a root and branch study of the international issues facing the United States, he did so in the shadow of Churchill's Fulton speech, and his declaration of the 'Truman Doctrine' responding to the aforementioned events in Europe and the Middle East. It culminated in NSC 68, whose authors, including the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, identified the hostile intent of the Soviet Union and advocated a massive build-up of American military might. As Walter Lafeber argued, with the American people by no means prepared to pay such costs, NSC 68 was 'a policy in search of an opportunity. That opportunity arrived on June 25, 1950.' (Lafeber, 2002, p. 103) Coming in the aftermath of the 'loss of China' to communism, American intervention in Korea was a radical departure from Kennan's original definition of non-military intervention and from focusing on the five key power centres that he identified as vital to American security.

### THE DILEMMA FOR BRITAIN – CONFLICTING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To understand how Britain became embroiled in the Korean War, it is first necessary to appreciate the country's strategic priorities in 1950. In June of that year, the British Chiefs of Staff set out the United Kingdom's position in their 'Allied Defence Policy and Global Strategy'. Here, the Chiefs defined as the 'first essential' of Britain's political and military aims the struggle against Russian

Communism. They concluded that the 'enemy's aim is quite clear – it is a communist world dominated by Moscow'. Echoing Kennan, the Chiefs concluded that Russian policy was 'fundamentally opportunist and the Soviet will always exploit any weaknesses – especially the weakness inherent in a lack of unified policy on the part of the Western democracies'. But they recognised how, historically, the Russians, while always aggressively expansionist in policy, 'do draw back when faced with determined opposition, a characteristic which communist Russia appears to share with imperial Russian policy – the tactical withdrawal when conditions are unfavourable'. The Chiefs, therefore, cautioned that the West should not be unduly impressed by the 'war of nerves' that would undoubtedly continue with varying intensity over the coming years.

The defence of Western Europe was absolutely vital. Militarily, this meant that the defence of Europe – including the United Kingdom – 'must have top priority. The primary offensive weapon in hot war must remain the atomic bomb.' The second most important theatre was the defence of the Middle East, which had 'always been one of the three pillars of British defence policy and it is of equally critical importance in Allied strategy'. It was the land bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa and a most important link in the Commonwealth system of sea and air communications. Its oil supplies could not be allowed to fall under Soviet control. Third, the Chiefs considered the key to the Cold War problem in the Far East to be China. Allied policy in that direction, 'while inflexibly anti-communist, should not be anti-Chinese'. It was important that 'we should not drive China irrevocably into the arms of Russia'. The Chiefs accepted that there was room for doubt over whether the inherent xenophobia of the Chinese would allow them to submit to Russia any more than to any other foreign intervention.

The front line of the Cold War in Asia lay not in Korea but in Indo-China, where the French were fighting communists; the British, meanwhile, were engaged in another anti-communist counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya. The most important object of British foreign policy in the Far East was to achieve a firm unity of policy between

the British Commonwealth, the United States and France. 'Nothing could suit our enemies better than for the Western Powers to pursue divergent objectives in the Far East and South-East Asia', considered the Chiefs (see 'Documents on British Policy Overseas' (DBPO), 1991, for report by Chiefs of Staff). The very idea that Korea would be the principal theatre in which East and West turned the Cold War into a Hot War seemed absurd. But that is precisely what happened with the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950. What would have surprised the Chiefs of Staff even more was that British ground forces were soon committed to the fight.

## BRITAIN'S DECISION TO COMMIT TROOPS – A POLITICAL NOT A MILITARY DECISION

What led to British forces being committed was a series of discussions, held between 20 and 24 July, between US and UK representatives in Washington on the 'Present World Situation'. The Americans were represented by General Omar Bradley and the British by Sir Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador, and Lord Tedder, the senior British military figure in Washington. The meetings were to alter fundamentally the British reaction to the Korean War. At the first meeting, on 20 July, the question of UN land forces in Korea was raised by Bradley. He emphasised that, with American forces pushed back by the advancing North Koreans, such reinforcements were of utmost importance from a military as well as a political aspect (TNA DEFE 11/196 BJSM).

Franks despatched a telegram to London, putting the case for the offer of British ground forces in Korea. The Ambassador's telegram changed British policy. Foreseeing a long and difficult ground campaign, the Americans knew that 'many nations will follow the British decision on this matter. They see us as the key to the situation and hence await our decision as more important to them and their purposes than any other.' The Americans looked to the British because underneath the thoughts and emotions engendered at times by 'difficulties and disagreements between us and them there is a steady and unquestioned assumption that we are

the only dependable ally and partner. This derives from our position in the world over past decades, our partnership with them in two world wars and their judgement of the British character. The Americans in Korea will be in a tough spot for a long time. They look round for their partner'. (TNA DEFE 11/197)

The Chiefs in London were sceptical of deploying British ground troops – there were strategic military reasons for not committing them – so it was the British prime minister, Clement Attlee, who took the decision to contribute forces on political grounds. On 24 July, the Prime Minister informed the Chiefs of his decision: although he fully understood that there were strong military reasons for not sending land forces to Korea, 'there were now strong psychological reasons for reviewing the situation'. Franks's telegram was the key, in that Attlee thought the 'moral' effect of providing this force would be considerable and that it was in fact now essential for a British token force to be provided (TNA DEFE 11/197).

## THE LIMITS OF BRITISH INFLUENCE – CONSULTED OR INFORMED?

The commitment of British land, air and naval forces meant that London was now intimately concerned with the conduct of the war. It was particularly concerned with the actions of the UN Supreme Commander, General MacArthur, who the British feared wanted a wider war with communist China. London was concerned over whether it was President Truman and the State Department, with the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, deciding policy, or was it MacArthur in Tokyo? Chinese military intervention heightened these concerns of a wider war that would draw in the Soviet Union – fears that did not lessen following MacArthur's removal in 1951.

British fears about American intentions were crystallised when Truman, at a press conference in December 1950, appeared to suggest that the atom bomb might be used in Korea (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950). Although it was clarified, quite quickly, that the President had not been advocating the use of the bomb in Korea

The Chiefs considered the key to the Cold War problem in the Far East to be China. Allied policy in that direction, 'while inflexibly anti-communist, should not be anti-Chinese'. It was important that 'we should not drive China irrevocably into the arms of Russia'. ☞

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*President Truman greeting British prime minister Clement Attlee at Washington National Airport, December 1950*

(Attlee later told the Cabinet that 'Truman didn't realise he'd dropped such a brick' (TNA CAB 195/8 C.M. 85 (50)), it did furnish an excuse for the British to persuade the White House that this was an opportune moment for an Anglo-American summit. When Attlee met with Truman in Washington, differences of emphasis emerged. The Prime Minister urged the Americans to take account of public opinion both in the United Nations and in America, Europe and Asia; he argued that the United Kingdom, through its Commonwealth associations, was perhaps particularly able to gauge opinion in Asia: 'If we became involved in war with China we should be playing the Russian game.' The Americans took a different view, with Acheson arguing that the central moving factor in this situation was not China but Russia. The former was a 'satellite' of Moscow (TNA PREM 8/1200).

What the British hoped for was an undertaking from the Americans to be 'consulted' on the use of the atomic bomb. They were disappointed. In a private meeting, the President promised Attlee that the UK would be consulted if Washington considered the use of atomic weapons; but, with no formal minute-takers present, the State Department later disputed that any formal commitment was given and only recognised the need to 'inform' the British (DBPO, 1991, note 2, p. 311). The British Foreign Office had to settle for the Prime Minister accepting the President's personal guarantee, 'which we can feel sure will be honoured while President Truman remains in office. More than that we cannot hope to obtain at present.' (BDPO, 1991, no. 111)

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## THE NUCLEAR OPTION – WAS THERE A REAL DANGER?

The limits of British influence did not mean that the Americans could ignore the former, who remained, after all, their principal allies. The relationship meant that the British maintained a privileged insight into American policy, allowing them to do what they could to influence Washington's thinking. The necessity for this was never more relevant than when the Korean Armistice, in 1953, saw President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill discuss Korean options at the Bermuda Conference, in December 1953. The British were in for a shock.

Eisenhower revealed, at the opening meeting, that the United States government would 'hit back with full power' in the event of a communist breach of the Korean Peninsular (TNA FO 371/105540 PM/53/337). He found the world in a 'rather hysterical condition about the atomic bomb' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954). The President privately informed Churchill that if there was a deliberate breach of the Armistice by the communists, 'we would expect to strike back with atomic weapons at military targets. We would not expect to bomb cities but would attack areas that were directly supporting the aggression.' The Prime Minister, according to the American record, replied that he 'quite accepted' this and that the President's statement put him in a position to say to Parliament that he had been consulted in advance and had agreed (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954b). The elderly Churchill was on his own here: his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, was staggered by the news, warning the Prime Minister: 'This goes far beyond anything we have hitherto agreed... we have never given, or been asked to give, approval... to the use of atom bombs.' Eden feared that the Chinese would not attack again in Korea without Soviet approval: the use of atomic weapons by the Americans would invite nuclear retaliation from Moscow (TNA FO 371/105540 PM/53/337). With American nuclear bomber bases in the UK, this meant unleashing a third world war and the possible nuclear devastation of Britain (TNA FO 371/105540 PM/53/339).



In the end, there was no breach of the Armistice. But the Korean stand-off illustrated the hair trigger by which the world was now away from a possible global nuclear confrontation in the region – and possibly beyond. Not long after Bermuda, the Americans exploded their first hydrogen bomb. The Soviets would follow suit. The nature of a future global war had been transformed by

thermo-nuclear weapons, and the possibility of the United Kingdom surviving in such a conflict was diminished considerably when compared to the aftermath of an atomic attack on it. And for Eden, it was the Americans, with their commitment to the first use of nuclear weapons in a renewed Korean conflict, who appeared to be the greatest danger to world peace.



President Eisenhower meets Winston Churchill at the Bermuda Conference, 1953

For Eden it was the Americans, with their commitment to the first use of nuclear weapons in a renewed Korean conflict, who appeared to be the greatest danger to world peace. ”

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## 1D SITUATING THE KOREAN WAR IN BRITISH HISTORY

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Until recently, the Korean War has lived up to its most famous soubriquet – the 'Forgotten War'. When war broke out in the summer of 1950, just five years after the end of the Second World War, it seemed to many British people a far more distant, more ambiguous war. Britain had few historic links with the Peninsula, and the war's uncertain progress, protracted peace negotiations and eventual conclusion in 1953 did little to cement its position in the national consciousness. Few British novels and films explored the Korean War after 1953 and even historians largely overlooked it as a violent anomaly in Britain's post-war history, a period much more associated with the establishment of the welfare state than the continuance of warfare.

But publications like this highlight just how important the Korean War is in understanding post-1945 British history. Militarily, the British Army faced some of its harshest battles in Korea – most famously the Battle of the Imjin in April 1951, but also the Battles of the Hook (1952 and 1953) – and 1,060 British servicemen withstood months of captivity as prisoners of war (Farrar-Hockley, 1995). British service personnel were a mixture of the old and the new: young National Service conscripts served alongside veterans of the last war, called up from the reserve or remaining as regulars. Of the Army, Royal Navy and a small Royal Air Force contingent sent to Korea, 1,078 service personnel were killed (Farrar-Hockley, 1995 – estimates of the total number of British service personnel vary due to the lack of official statistics; official historian Anthony Farrar-Hockley indicates a standing commitment of 27,000 but an overall commitment of 81,084, but it is unclear whether this includes Commonwealth forces). Politically, the war posed awkward questions for Clement Attlee's post-war Labour government and exposed the weaknesses in Britain's international standing and relationship with the United States. In wider society, it prompted short-lived panics about the potential use of nuclear weaponry in the early

stages of the war, the dangers of communist 'brainwashing' techniques in prisoner of war camps and the threat of the 'enemy from within' in Britain itself (Daily Mail, 1950). Many of these worries persisted after the war and came to define British culture in the Cold War. The Korean War also demonstrated just how much the long years of war between 1939 and 1945 had changed how ordinary people understood war itself and how they memorialised conflict in the post-war world, something that would shape how the Korean War was remembered – or forgotten.

Britain's Korean War is therefore not only an important episode in military history, but it also had profound political, social, economic and foreign policy implications for Britain itself. This publication shows the many ways in which we can encourage learners to engage with the complex histories of the Korean War and the British role within it. This short introduction provides a brief overview of some key concepts and new approaches that historians have used when analysing Britain's involvement in 'the Forgotten War'.

### WELFARE, WARFARE AND DIPLOMACY IN THE COLD WAR WORLD

Britain's Korean War must first be set against the domestic backdrop of post-war politics. Even before the Second World War had ended, people across Britain had begun to think about what they wanted Britain to be like after the war. Clement Attlee's Labour Party's manifesto *Let Us Face the Future Together* (1945) had promised an ambitious set of policies to promote economic reconstruction and social change after the Second World War. Labour's victory in the 1945 general election led to a new programme of reforms, most notably social reforms, which many today see as the foundation of the modern 'welfare state'.

These included acts regarding housing, national insurance and – most famously – the foundation of a National Health Service (NHS) in 1948.

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The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 potentially challenged this welfare agenda. Minister for Health Aneurin 'Nye' Bevan famously resigned from the Cabinet in April 1951 over the increase in defence spending due to the Korean War, which had led to the introduction of charges for false teeth and glasses. For Bevan, these charges challenged the foundational idea that the NHS should be free at the point of use. Yet historian David Kynaston points out that one 1950 Gallup poll estimated that 78% of people supported increased defence expenditure. For all their emphasis on domestic reform, the Attlee government had taken a strong line on foreign policy, in particular the foreign secretary Ernest Bevin and Attlee himself. In a radio broadcast in July 1950, shortly after the outbreak of the war, Attlee told listeners that 'The fire that has been started in distant Korea may burn down your house' and told them that Britain needed to stop aggression, as it had done in the last war (Daily Mail, 1950). For Attlee and others, the Korean War was not therefore a challenge to their vision of post-war Britain, but a necessary undertaking to protect it. As historian David Edgerton has argued, warfare as well as welfare thus characterised post-war Britain (Edgerton, 2006). John Newsinger goes even further, arguing that the praise given to the Attlee administration for its domestic programme obscures the Labour government's hard-nosed 'imperial strategy', such as its continued involvement in colonial wars and even its reluctance to grant independence to India in 1947 (Newsinger, 2018). In this way, histories of Britain's Cold War – and its experiences in the Korean War – overlap with its complicated position at the end of empire, as well as the fluctuating demands of welfare and warfare.

Yet there are some who ask whether Britain should even be *included* in histories of the Cold War at all. Anders Stephanson argued that the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was always at the core of the 'Cold War' and that to extend it beyond those two superpowers dilutes the meaning and usability of the term (Stephanson, 2012). As Lawrence Freedman puts it, the Cold War is not *'everything'* that happened *everywhere* between 1945 and



Labour Party election poster, 1945

1991' (2010, emphasis added). Yet others argue that the conflict had a global reach that affected Britain profoundly: its fixation with the 'special relationship' with the United States during the Cold War, for instance, is important in explaining Britain's turbulent relationship with Europe after 1945. On a cultural level too, the Cold War shaped a generation of British fiction, television and film (see Hammond, 2013, and Shaw, 2001). Britain influenced the course of the Cold War: its proximity to mainland Europe made it strategically significant, as did its imperial and military spheres of influence and its possession of nuclear weaponry. Britain also had some influence at the United Nations and NATO, albeit less than the US, but significant nonetheless (Stueck, 2002). We might usually ask our students then to consider whether Britain was the 'junior partner' in the Korean War or whether it had influence over its strategy, operations or tactics, either on its own or in collaboration with the other Commonwealth countries who came to form the 1st Commonwealth Division on 28 July 1951 (see Grey, 1998, and Barnes, 2010).

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flag will be beside them’ (British Pathé, 1950). But historians differ on the significance of such statements, particularly as Attlee made this statement during ‘crisis’ talks in Washington. Peter Hennessy has interpreted Korea as the height of Britain’s influence over decision-making in the Cold War, whereas Callum MacDonald highlighted just how uneasy the US response to Chinese intervention in November 1950 made Attlee and his cabinet (MacDonald, 1990). There were other more subtle differences between the two nations too. In April 1951 at the Imjin River, as two divisions of Chinese troops bore down on 29th Brigade, British Brigadier Tom Brodie reported to the American Corps headquarters that their situation was ‘a bit sticky’. Presuming that no situation described as ‘sticky’ could be that grievous, the Americans did not send sufficient support: the subsequent capture of many men from the 1st Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment highlighted just how much of an understatement it had been. For some, this anecdote represents the cultural, as well as political, differences between Britain and the United States, and it has entered the popular folklore that surrounds the war (Hastings, 1987; Reynolds, 1987).

## THE BRITISH MILITARY EXPERIENCE

British soldiers recall the difficult conditions of the Korean War, particularly in the intensely cold winter of 1950–1951, equipment shortages and the seemingly harsh landscape. But they also later remembered the hardship they saw the Koreans enduring too, the many thousands of refugees they passed on the roads. Yet, though it was unique in many ways, the Korean War was still overshadowed

*British soldiers of the Royal Ulster Rifles digging in frozen ground north of Seoul, just before the Chinese attack of 2 January 1951*



by the Second World War, even at the time. Soldiers wrote about ‘the last war’ frequently and some younger service personnel saw it as their chance to do something as great as their fathers (Montgomery, 1954).

But source material like this requires careful analysis. Service personnel from *all* wars stress the difficulty of speaking and writing about their experiences: the boredom, fear, discomfort and violence of warfare is hard to express, even if people are willing to listen (Harari, 2008). But historians of Britain’s Korean War do have access to ‘primary source’ material in the form of letters written home, diaries and oral history interviews conducted many years after the war. All these sources offer a different perspective and require different analytical tools, but all are attempts by service personnel to make sense of the war and the world around them. Historians of war and conflict increasingly use such ‘life-writing’ material to tell the histories not simply of what happened on the battlefield, but also the outlook of individuals and their sense of themselves as part of the military and even as citizens in the post-1945 world (Gill, 2010; McLoughlin, 2010).

Service personnel also wrote histories of the war. Anthony Farrar-Hockley published two official histories of the British role in the early 1990s. Farrar-Hockley was a senior figure in the British military in the late twentieth century and had been the Adjutant of the 1st Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, during its infamous ‘stand’ at the Imjin River. His detailed narrative history provides a meticulous account of British military actions during the war (Farrar-Hockley, 1990, 1995). Taken captive in Korea in April 1951, Farrar-Hockley also wrote an autobiographical account of his experiences much earlier too, and many other service personnel wrote published (and unpublished) memoirs of their experiences (1954). Memoirs such as naval officer Dennis Lankford’s *I Defy!* (1954) and chaplain Sam Davies’s *In Spite of Dungeons* (1954) remain some of the most compelling British narratives of the war, as do newer publications such as Ethel McNair’s *A British Army Nurse in the Korean War* (2007) and Fred Hayhurst’s *Green Berets in Korea* (2001).

Shortly after the war there was also a small burst of fiction-writing about the war: Simon Kent's novel, *A Hill in Korea* (1954), follows the unfortunate exploits of one patrol largely composed of National Service conscripts, and John Holland's searing novel *The Dead, the Dying and the Damned* (1956) was a best-seller. These accounts deeply enrich our understanding of what it felt like to live through the Korean War, but they also tell us something about the way in which the war was remembered after it happened: how the memories of the conflict changed over time, even after the war had ended. These publications are therefore 'primary' sources as well for students and teachers of Britain's Korean War.

## PRISONERS OF WAR AND THE INVENTION OF BRAINWASHING

Another distinctive element of Britain's Korean War was the experiences of its prisoners of war. Twenty-five Royal Marines were captured in November 1950 at Jangin (Chosin) and 80 officers and other ranks (most Royal Ulster Rifles) were taken in the first Chinese Offensive in January 1951. The capture of the largest number of British troops took place at Imjin River (527, including Colonel James Power Carne, who was awarded the Victoria Cross), and small numbers of others were taken in minor engagements in November 1951. Prisoner of war historians point out that their captivity does not fit with our vision of barbed wire, watch towers and daring escapes, images so prevalent in Second World War films. In fact, many Korean War prisoner of war camps were located in a network of abandoned villages and camps along the Yalu River in the north, and the distances involved made the possibility of escape very limited. Initially overseen by DPRK forces, China assumed responsibility for POWs in 1951 and ran distinctive 're-education' classes for POWs, calling on them to reconsider their role in this 'senseless' American war (Huxford, 2015). Only one British serviceman defected to China after his imprisonment, Royal Marine Andrew Condron. He later claimed that he wanted to see a Marxist society in action, though he returned to the UK in 1962 (Mackenzie, 2011).

These re-education classes had more far-reaching consequences in Britain and America. In 1950,

journalist Edward Hunter first used the term 'brainwashing' (originally a Chinese term, *hsi-nao*) to describe Chinese re-education methods and, though the term was quickly dismissed within the scientific community, it became culturally very popular. Brainwashing became a key element of Cold War films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *The Ipcress File* (1965), starring Michael Caine. In 1961, the ability of 'turning' someone in captivity was exemplified still further by the imprisonment of former intelligence officer George Blake, who had acted as a Soviet double agent since he had been imprisoned in Korea during the war. Blake later staged a dramatic escape from Wormwood Scrubs prison, fleeing to the Soviet Union. Fascinating as these examples are, cultural historians would point out that they tell us much more about how British and American societies responded generally to Cold War threats, rather than whether brainwashing actually existed or not. We only have to look at its subsequent history to realise that the *term* brainwashing had a long afterlife, regardless of whether it existed or not (and the scientific community was largely sceptical). Historian Kathleen Taylor notes how 'useful' the term has been for politicians and how it has been used since 1950 to describe varying disagreeable or inexplicable views (Taylor, 2004). Brainwashing as *an idea*, then, is one of the most powerful cultural legacies of the Korean War.

## RESPONSES TO THE KOREAN WAR IN BRITAIN

As 'brainwashing' shows, people back in Britain responded to the war in a variety of ways. First came anxiety, even panic. In Mass Observation surveys conducted in the first months of the war (these social surveys ran from 1937 to the early 1950s, observing and recording personal writing, conversation and behaviour in Britain – see [www.massobs.org.uk](http://www.massobs.org.uk)), people describe being 'frightened' and worrying about what would happen to their families. Some of this concern came from memories of Second World War bombing of urban areas, and some people considered rebuilding their air-raid shelters. But after the initial worries and the dramatic events of the first year of the war, Korea became less visible in the press and in

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people’s memories of the early 1950s. By the end of the war, one news report argued that England’s cricket victory in the Ashes was more celebrated than returning troops (Bury Free Press, 1953). As British troops became more static in the second half of the war, attention lessened, not helped by the inconclusive end of the war and continued division of Korea.

But not everyone was apathetic about the war. Members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) expressed their opposition to the war fiercely in their publications and through various peace and ‘friendship’ organisations. Politicians from within the Labour Party too called for an end to hostilities: Monica Felton, Chairman of the Stevenage Development Corporation, was sacked from her position for visiting North Korea on a sponsored visit. Elsewhere, the ‘Red Dean of Canterbury’ Hewlett Johnson (1874–1966) and the

*Communist Daily Worker sellers near Marble Arch protest the US action in June 1950*



scientist Joseph Needham (1900–95) alleged that the United States Air Force had conducted a ‘germ’ warfare campaign in northern China. Some of these figures were dismissed as eccentric, but some newspapers called them traitors and

lobbied for them to be tried in court as such. For historians of anti-war protest, the Korean War marks an important early episode in anti-nuclear protest, which hit the headlines later in the decade with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)’s first Aldermaston march in spring 1958 (Hudson, 2005).

## REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN WAR

But if the Korean War was so controversial, why was it forgotten? Some of the reasons lie in its unclear aims, the nature of the fighting and the outcome of the war itself. The shadow cast by the Second World War also meant that Korea failed to attain a distinct place within British and memorial popular culture. Charles S. Young suggests that the story of the Korean War also fails to fit within a ‘usable past’, unlike the Second World War or the much-criticised Vietnam War (Young, 2014). However, we can also ask whether the Korean War is still forgotten in the same way in Britain: it features in major museums of war and conflict, its new memorial on the Victoria Embankment in London opened in 2014, and the war is even mentioned in television programmes such as *Call the Midwife*. As this publication demonstrates, it can also be usefully taught throughout the secondary curriculum. The history of the Korean War in Britain must therefore address the changing significance and remembrance of the war in the twenty-first century, even as the generation who served in the war pass away. The war might, in short, be forgotten no longer.

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