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*Like a body cut in half: remembering partition in Korea and China*¹

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“We say to you: We have been divided by forces outside ourselves, like a body cut in half. How can such a sundered body survive and function properly? We must be allowed to have an opportunity to organize our national life as a unified whole, so as to meet the requirements set forth in the Cairo Declaration.”

Syngman Rhee, Chairman, United Central Council, “Resolution of the Korean Congress of Political Parties,” Addressed to the Four Allied Powers and the American public, Seoul, November 4, 1945.³

“The 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation have all affirmed Taiwan's legal status as an inalienable part of China.... Any attempt to separate Taiwan from China is doomed to fail and Taiwan will eventually be reunited with its motherland. The United States should sober-mindedly understand this.”

“Stopping ‘Taiwan Independence’ Key to Peace,” *People's Daily*, May 31, 2004⁴

INTRODUCTION: *PHANTOM LIMBS*

In the immediate wake of Allied victory in the Second World War, the world lay in pieces. Korea and China, nations that had been subjugated by (and immersed in resistance struggles against) Japanese occupation, awaited the restoration of national sovereignty, independence and self-determination each had been promised by Allied Powers in the 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Potsdam Declaration. However, for

¹ This paper is a work in progress for discussion at the June 2004 SHAFR conference in Austin Texas. The author wishes to thank Bart Bernstein, Sangmin Shim, Gi-Wook Shin, Matt Sommer, and William Stueck. An earlier version of portions of this paper has been previously published in “Divided Lands, Phantom Limbs: Partition in the Indian Subcontinent, Palestine, China and Korea,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 2, Spring 2004. As the title of that paper suggests, the discussion of China and Korea presented in this work in progress is part of a larger study of partition in the immediate post-World War II period, including analysis of ethnic partition in the Indian Subcontinent and Palestine following the collapse of British control in 1947-1949.

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³ See *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) Volume VI, 1945, p. 1110.

⁴ <http://www.chinaembassy.se/eng/65394.html>

the people of the Korean peninsula, and the Chinese mainland, these promises of national unification remain unrealized.

In each nation, in the months following the Japanese defeat, rival groups confronted each other with increasing violence, each seeking to define the national identity of their people, and to establish long-awaited national liberation on their own terms. In each case, international intervention – specifically, for purposes of this essay, military intervention by the United States – determined the outcome of an increasingly brutal civil war. As a result, in the end, each nation was partitioned by “forces outside ourselves.”⁵ Each partition, initially expected to be temporary, became fixed – at least thus far in a process that has yet to run its course. In turn, each partition created a permanent irredenta, communities separated by political borders who have never ceased to lament the “dismemberment” of the “motherland” and strive toward its eventual reunification. In each case, truncated landscapes, lost to political enemies or abandoned by the mass-exodus of refugees, became “phantom limbs” in a nation’s identity.

American officials were directly responsible for dividing Korea at the 38th parallel in 1945. Of course, they were not responsible for Chaing Kai-shek’s flight to Taiwan (Formosa), and the occupation by Guomindang (or GMD) forces in Taiwan in 1949.⁶ Indeed, the United States had made it clear that it would not defend the Generalissimo upon the anticipated attack by Mao’s forces expected to occur in May 1950. But

⁵ Of course it is somewhat strange to use the word “partition” in the case of China/Taiwan. Unlike the division of Korea at the 38th parallel, a line on a map dividing the land otherwise without natural separation or barriers, Taiwan is divided from China’s mainland by a hundred miles of water: the Taiwan Straits. I use the term “partition” here to refer to China’s political division. Both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since Mao Zedong and the Guomindang (GMD) since Jiang Jieshi (with the exception of some but not all of its current membership) have recognized, and lamented, this division since 1949. Today, from the point of view of Beijing, and arguably the vast majority of mainland Chinese, this partition remains a painful reminder of the failure of the Chinese Civil War to reach its culmination.

⁶ The Nationalist organization is often translated as “Kuomintang” and abbreviated as “KMT”.

everything changed on the evening of 24 June of that year, as U.S. officials learned that Kim Il Sung's soldiers – more than a hundred thousand troops – were crossing the 38th parallel in massive human waves toward Seoul and Korea's southern zone. Decisions made by the United States and UN forces under American command in the next few days, and in the weeks and months that followed, ensured that what Koreans and Chinese had seen as temporary divisions would instead become permanent borders.

More than a half-century later, the yearning for reunification remains a powerful, recurring theme of official and unofficial pronouncements by representatives of both North Korea and South Korea. Earlier this month, in a June 15, 2004 speech, South Korean Minister of Unification Jeong Se-hyun described the population of the ROK and DPRK as a single "nation": "The South and the North, a nation of 70 million people, will continue our efforts to bring down the Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula."⁷ The efforts by the South Korean Ministry of Unification, with great popular support, are unrestrained by memories of the DPRK's catastrophic 1950 effort to achieve unification by military force.

The moment the Truman Administration decided to go to war in defense of South Korea, in the immediate hours and days following Kim Il Jong's invasion, was the same moment the United States – in an immediate, stunning and effectively permanent policy reversal – intervened militarily in the Chinese civil war to prevent Mao from conquering Jiang's regime in Taiwan.

Again, more than half a century later, the perception of China's unnatural and unwanted division, and a desire for unification, also represents not only PRC policy concerning the status of Taiwan, but, I would argue, mainstream popular feeling,

⁷ Republic of Korea Ministry of Unification website, <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/>, June 23, 2004.

especially in periods of intensified Chinese nationalism triggered by cross-Straits tension (such as 1995-96, and today). The situation is more complicated among the Taiwanese, where bitter divisions between the Democratic Progressive Party (and its “Pan-Green” coalition allies) and the Nationalist Guomindang (GMD) Party (and its “Pan-Blue” coalition allies) reflect opposing visions of Taiwanese/Chinese national identity. But in neither Korea nor China, even after more than half a century, has the underlying civil war ended. In neither case has national reconciliation been achieved, either by means of military victory or political negotiation.

This paper revisits a history that has been exhaustively researched and documented, interpreted, and reinterpreted. Paradoxically, however, this history remains “forgotten,” as the clichéd but still-evocative label suggests, at least among Americans generally. It is forgotten not as a matter of historiography, but in the domains of collective memory and public policy analysis. In both contexts, to be more accurate, it is not the case that the Korea and China partitions are not “remembered” in the United States; rather, they are often not remembered *well*, i.e. usefully, accurately and with the sophisticated attention to the nuances and complexity this extremely troubled, painful history requires.⁸

⁸ U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld has on several recent occasions compared the U.S.-initiated invasion and occupation of Iraq to the participation of U.S. troops in the Korean War. Donald H. Rumsfeld, “The Price of Freedom in Iraq,” *New York Times*, Op-Ed, March 19, 2004. Indeed, U.S. soldiers demonstrated -- and in the case of Iraq, continue to demonstrate -- enormous bravery and self-sacrifice in both conflicts, for which all Americans should be grateful. But otherwise Secretary Rumsfeld’s analogy is misleading. In contrast to President Bush’s “pre-emptive” war, the U.S. troops defended the South Koreans against the onslaught of invading forces – the Soviet-trained army of Kim Il Sung’s North Korean regime. Moreover, U.S. intervention was explicitly authorized by the United Nations, and U.S. soldiers served under a U.N. banner and command. Unfortunately, as this paper suggests, a more appropriate analogy to the current situation in Iraq is suggested by the U.S. military occupation of the Korea’s southern zone in the months immediately following Japan’s defeat in World War Two. The Korean people’s joy at the collapse of Japanese domination promptly disintegrated into widespread discontent, mass demonstration and political agitation – a process witnessed, and recorded, by American authorities with irony and dismay. In

The Korean War remains misunderstood among Americans as a result of oversimplified, distorted historical accounts, and ignored as if an obscure footnote to the Cold War, of interest to aged veterans, current soldiers stationed in the ROK, professional historians, and presumably the people who live on either side of Korea's 38th parallel or Taiwan Straits, but of little meaning for our society as it addresses the security challenges of the 21st century. This is extremely unfortunate, in my view, and largely unnecessary. On the contrary, the Korean War need not and should not remain "forgotten;" indeed, an accurate, sophisticated understanding of the Korean War is an indispensable component of 20th century historical studies in American secondary and higher education. To the extent that ignorance and misinformation about the Korean War is perpetuated by the poor quality of textbooks from which high school and college students are taught Korean War history, we should take as the first order of business the replacement of these inadequate narratives with accounts more consistent with our current knowledge about the war, its origins and its aftermath.⁹

Iraq today, courageous U.S. soldiers have been placed in a comparably untenable position, although fraught with considerably greater dangers. Their predicament suggests no less irony and dismay.

⁹ Philip West, Mansfield Professor of Modern Asian Affairs at the University of Montana, recently studied the treatment of the Korean War in the 20th Century American History textbooks used in Montana public high schools and colleges (eleven such books were analyzed and compared). Philip West, "American Memory and Textbooks on the Korean War," *Sharing the Burden of the Past: Legacies of War in Europe, America and Asia* (Tokyo, The Asia Foundation/Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003) p. 71. See also Philip West, "Teaching 'Our Side' and the 'Other Side' in the Korean War (1950-1953)," in *Education About Asia*, Winter 2002 (Vol. 7, No. 3). To put it mildly, these textbooks do not reflect contemporaneous advances in historiographical scholarship on the origins and consequences of the Korean War, include information gathered from recently-opened archives, or acknowledge complexities or ambiguities recognized by virtually all fine scholars in the field. On the contrary, these books present a radically oversimplified narrative, in which "South Korea is portrayed as unqualified friend and ally, while North Korea and China (and the Soviet Union) are portrayed in aggressive and demonic images" thereby suggesting an "ideological struggle between good and evil." In only one of the eleven textbooks "the prevailing image of unprovoked aggression by the North is qualified with reference to the war as a 'civil war' in which 'both sides' threatened war before 25 June 1950." *Ibid*, at 71, 73. West argues that a more evenhanded approach would more accurately reflect our knowledge about the Korean War, include Korean voices and perspectives, and better serve the cause of reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia more generally. I strongly agree.

Given the catastrophic destruction and carnage suffered by the people of South Korea during the war, and the gargantuan security threat they still face from DPRK forces still amassed against them at the 38th parallel, one might assume that the history of those events, the lessons drawn from them, remain at the center of public consciousness and political discourse in the Republic of Korea itself. This is indeed the case among the military elite, whose highest generals include veterans who fought as teenagers in the 1950-53 conflict, among others of the generation that remembers the war. However, as indicated by the demographics of recent election results and popular opinion polls, this is not the case among a large majority of those who now constitute South Korea's younger generation.¹⁰

In contrast, Korean War history is apparently far from "forgotten" in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), where memories of U.S. intervention are manipulated into images and perceptions about an America that has never ceased to be North Korea's most hated enemy. Nor has the Korean War, or its impact on the Chinese Civil War, been forgotten in the People's Republic of China (PRC), or the

¹⁰ "Recent polls show that perceived U.S. government arrogance, disrespect, and unilateralism in its dealings with South Korea, and in its conduct of foreign policy in general, has created deep resentment among a growing percentage of South Koreans, including those within traditionally supportive elite circles. South Korean public opinion on the health of the U.S.- ROK relationship has reached a major low. Ironically, many South Koreans consider the United States a greater threat to peace on the peninsula than North Korea....In addition, growing differences in perspective and policy approaches toward North Korea not only strike at the heart of the U.S.-ROK alliance, but also feed and reinforce mutual distrust and resentment. While the United States has taken a more assertive stance after 9/11 against North Korea over the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the fear of North Korea no longer looms over the South Korean public. South Korea's view of national security has traditionally been based on stability of the peninsula rather than international considerations such as nuclear nonproliferation. Many in South Korea do not believe that Kim Jong-il will use nuclear weapons against the South, believing that the possibility of war on the peninsula is slim as long as South Korea continues a policy of engagement with North Korea. As the sense of a military threat from the North abates, the perceived motivation for the U.S.-ROK alliance disintegrates." Kim Seung-hwan, "A Dormant Volcano? Korean Sentiment Towards United States," *Korea Herald*, May 9, 2004.

Republic of China (ROC).¹¹ Indeed, the memory of these cataclysmic events, and the lessons drawn from them, are very much alive in collective memory, political discourse, mass media propaganda, and strategic planning in North Korea, China and Taiwan. If United States foreign and security policy fails to adequately take into account Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese perceptions of this history, and its meaning, we do so at our peril.

The following narrative offers no new evidence, documentation or archival material. Rather, drawn from familiar primary sources (largely including well-known documents published in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series) and highly-regarded secondary sources (including scholarship by Bruce Cumings and William Stueck), this paper seeks to present an integrated framework for remembering these events – a framework organized around the problem of Korean and Chinese partition. I hope thereby to suggest useful analytical tools, and possible lessons, for addressing the legacy and meaning of these events for citizens of each affected nation at the outset of the 21st century. This framework therefore highlights (indeed, with urgency) the following question: How can U.S. foreign policy today best contribute to an ending of Korean and Chinese civil wars – wars that became “frozen” as a result of U.S. intervention; an ending that will contribute to greater peace, security and human rights in Northeast Asia – and, above all, to a reduction in the threat of catastrophic regional war?

PARTITION IN KOREA AND CHINA: TOWARD AN INTEGRATED HISTORY

Envisioning post-war Korea

¹¹ For an oral history of the Korean War from Chinese perspectives, and an analysis of strategic and political lessons currently drawn from the war, see generally Xiaobing Li, Allan R. Millet, Bin Yu, translators and editors, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, (Lawrence, Kansas; University Press of Kansas, 2001).

In early 1943, Roosevelt had initially proposed the establishment of a trusteeship made up of the U.S., Britain, China, and the Soviet Union to govern Korea for an interim period after the war. Britain didn't like this idea, as it suggested an anti-colonial position that threatened its interests in maintaining control over India. The Koreans didn't like it either; they wanted independence immediately following Japan's defeat. FDR's trusteeship idea never got off the ground.¹²

In the closing days of November, as war raged between Japanese and Allied forces throughout Asia (including allied Nationalist and communist forces in China), Roosevelt and Churchill met with Jiang at the Mena House Hotel in Cairo, Egypt. (Stalin was not present; the Soviet Union and Japan, "guided by a desire to strengthen peaceful and friendly relations between the two countries" had signed a neutrality pact in April 1941.) On December 1st the three leaders produced the Cairo Declaration, announcing plans for a post-war restoration of sovereignty of islands and territories seized or occupied by Japanese forces.

Specifically, the Declaration made it clear that the island of Formosa would be "restored" to the Republic of China. This announcement implied, first, that Taiwan belonged to China, and second, that China belonged to Jiang's Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD) government. In addition, the Declaration also made it clear that "Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed." Above all, this meant expulsion from Korea, a nation that had suffered horribly under Japanese colonial rule since 1910. "The aforesaid three great powers," the Cairo Declaration announced, "mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent."

¹² A second U.N.-mediated effort in 1946-47 to establish a trusteeship over Korea also failed.

Korea's partition, a drama in five acts

On August 6th, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Two days later, Stalin entered the war against Japan. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers invaded Manchuria, racing toward Korea. On August 9th the second atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki. The Americans anticipated an immediate Japanese surrender. Suddenly, as battalions of Soviet troops moved south with all deliberate speed, the problem of Korea, and the divisions of Cold War geopolitics, became starkly apparent.

William Stueck describes Korea's 38th parallel as "a line on a map, nothing more" that "followed no political boundaries or physical features within Korea."¹³ As described by the official U.S. Army history of the Korean War, this line traversed "75 streams and 12 rivers, intersected many high ridges at variant angles, severed 181 small cart roads, 104 country roads, 15 provincial all weather roads, 8 better-class highways, and 6 north-south rail lines."¹⁴ How did this line come to define the boundaries and borders of a partitioned Korea?

Act one: the Rusk-Bonesteel line

During a meeting of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), held in the Pentagon office of Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy in the evening of 10 August, and into the early morning hours the next day, U.S. officials planned for the anticipated Japanese surrender in Korea. On one hand, James Byrnes, two weeks into his new appointment as Secretary of State, had made clear the American's objective: "to receive the surrender as far north as practicable." On the other hand, "[t]he military was

¹³ William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.12.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 4 volumes (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961-72) (USAKW), 3:11, cited in Stueck, 2002, p. 12.

faced with the scarcity of U.S. forces immediately available and time and space factors which would make it difficult to reach very far north before Soviet troops could enter the area.” Meeting participants shared the view that if the U.S. proposal for receiving the surrender “greatly overreached our probable military capabilities, there would be little likelihood of Soviet acceptance.” McCloy then asked two Army colonels (Dean Rusk and C.H. Bonesteel, III) “to retire to an adjoining room and come up with a proposal.” Rusk and Bonesteel drew a line on the Korean map at the 38th parallel. This line, just above the Korean capital, Seoul, was further north than U.S. troops could swiftly reach; thus it pushed somewhat beyond the limit of what meeting participants believed the Soviets would accept.¹⁵

Japan surrendered on August 14. Still, Soviet troops continued to cross the border into Manchuria, pushing deeper into the Korean peninsula. But Stalin, in the end, accepted the American-drawn boundary, pulling his Red Army troops north to allow U.S. forces to reach as far north as Seoul.¹⁷ General John Reed Hodge, commander of the XXIV Corps of the U.S. Tenth Army, initiated what he called “our scramble move”: a

¹⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* Volume VI, 1945, p. 1039.

¹⁷ David Holloway points out that the Soviets were set to occupy the northern half of Hokkaido. On August 19, Marshal Vasilevskii ordered the 1st Far Eastern Front to prepare for the invasion. But Stalin changed his mind, rescinding the order to occupy Hokkaido just three days later. David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) p.131. Had the United States not destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic weapons, would an eventual Allied victory in Japan, perhaps several months later in 1945, have resulted in a U.S.-Soviet partition of Japan itself?

rushed transfer of American forces from Okinawa to Seoul.¹⁸ General Hodge and his troops accepted the Japanese surrender in Korea on September 2nd.

Act two: *powder keg*

The Korean people's joy at the Japanese defeat, after decades of bitter servitude (including the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Korean "comfort women" conscripted to provide sex to Japanese troops in the field) promptly disintegrated into shock and dismay. There would be no national liberation, after all. Throughout the ensuing months, American occupying forces faced mass demonstrations by Koreans who saw in their country's unwanted division a betrayal of the Cairo Declaration's promise that the Korean nation would become "free and independent" after the Japanese defeat.

"Southern Korea can best be described as a powder keg ready to explode at the application of a spark," wrote H. Merrell Benninghoff, political advisor to the Secretary of State, in a September 15th memorandum to Foggy Bottom. "There is great disappointment that immediate independence and sweeping out of the Japanese did not eventuate." As a result, "Korea is completely ripe for agitators." In the northern zone, the Soviets "have not respected the rights of individuals, either Japanese or Korean, and constant reports of indiscriminate rape, pillage and looting are received from all areas occupied by Soviet forces." Most disturbingly for occupation authorities, "communist-inspired" demonstrations had spread throughout the southern zone, which had become "fertile ground" for such activities, especially as they called for the immediate seizure of Japanese properties. Benninghoff's memo suggested that escalating agitation could

¹⁸ Bruce Cumings, *The Origin of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes (1945-1947)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) p. 125.

“bring about chaos in our area so as to cause the Koreans to repudiate the United States in favor of Soviet ‘freedom’ and control.”¹⁹

Act three: *Hodge’s about-face*

General Hodge had previously served as XXIV corps in the Pacific War, commanding forces at the decisive and horrific battles of Guadalcanal, Leyte and Okinawa, had been widely recognized for his heroism (he was awarded the Legion of Merit and the Distinguished Service Medal) and aggressive warfare (war correspondents called him “the Patton of the Pacific”). Stueck describes Hodge as “a hard-nosed corps commander with little tact, even less knowledge of Korea, and profoundly conservative instincts.” In a 24 September memorandum to General MacArthur in his Tokyo headquarters, General Hodge added further to Benninghoff’s lament: “there is no change in attitude of Koreans toward the Japs and/or in their attitude toward independence.” In Seoul, Koreans are “beginning to settle on the surface.”

However, there is a growing deep-seated distrust of Allied intentions concerning, and real dissatisfaction with the division of Korea along the 38° line into two occupation zones occupied by forces with such widely divergent policies. Many intelligent Koreans have already reached the conclusion that the Allied Powers have no intention of building up a Korean nation.... Based on policies to date there is little to encourage them in the belief that the Allied promise of Korean independence is sincere.

Hodge, the commander of the American military occupation of the southern zone, expressed to his superior officer the following conclusion:

I consider the current division of Korea into two occupational zones under widely divergent policies to pose an insurmountable obstacle to uniting Korea into a nation. In my opinion the Allied Powers, by this division, have created a situation impossible of peaceful correction with credit to the United States unless immediate action on an international level is forthcoming to establish an overall provisional government which will be fully supported by the occupation forces under common policy.

¹⁹ FRUS Volume VI, 1945, pp.1049-1053.

Present conditions of national division and parallel U.S./Soviet military occupations, in Hodge's view, placed the Korean people in an intolerable position in the context of Korea's still-searing memories of Japanese imperial subjugation. They "cannot be so treated without the everlasting enmity of Koreans toward those nations who so treat them." As a result of recent history, Hodge emphasized that "the country is ripe for anything that releases them from the Japanese" and, indeed, the Korean people are "most favorable toward some type of democratic government and particularly toward the United States." He argued: "During this receptive phase immediately following the breach of Japanese control is the time to unite factions and begin formative education in democracy" in a unified Korean nation. In this context, "[c]ontinuation of separation of the country into two parts under opposed ideologies will be fatal."²⁰

On 16 December, General MacArthur forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff another memo from Hodge, endorsing its "reiteration of certain facts and recommendations." Writes Hodge:

The dual occupation of Korea with Russia north and US south of the 38th degree parallel imposes an impossible condition upon our occupation missions of establishing sound economy and preparing Korea for future independence. In South Korea the US [is] blamed for the partition and [there] is growing resentment against all Americans in the area including passive resistance to constructive efforts we make here... The word pro-American is being added to pro-Jap, national traitor and Jap collaborator... Every Korean knows full well that under the dual occupation any talk of real freedom and independence is purely academic. It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, ever to accomplish the unity spirit in the Koreans until they see the present 38th parallel barrier removed. Every day of delay fosters further and permanent division of the people.²¹

²⁰ FRUS, Vol. VI, pp. 1054-55.

²¹ FRUS, Vol. VI, pp. 1144-48.

Hodge's urgent messages, and recommendations for a reversal in policy, went nowhere. As he had predicted, circumstances grew increasingly desperate. But Hodge was not about to resign his post over the issue. Rather, his role in the partition drama gradually shifted from partisan opposition to pragmatic accommodation. In the end, as much as any U.S. official, Hodge was responsible for building political institutions in the southern zone that further divided the Korean nation, and placed increasingly hostile, ideologically-opposed regimes and armed forces on either side of the boundary. Rather than eliminating the hated 38th parallel boundary, U.S. generals and diplomats came to treat the hastily-drawn Rusk-Bonesteel line, with resignation, as a political and military border.

But what if U.S. decision-makers had more aggressively followed the approach Hodge had recommended in the initial weeks of his command? Could a democratic unification of the country have emerged under circumstances when Soviet forces, controlling the north, had already installed a communist regime under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, a major anti-Japanese guerilla leader in Manchuria, trained by the Soviet military?

We can never know, and counter-historical argument is inherently suspect. The failure of the December 27, 1945 "Moscow Communique" – and specifically, the Soviet refusal to abide by its requirements – suggest that no such alternative policy could have been realized. Even if such a unification effort would come to fruition, one can be skeptical about its prospects for preventing a consolidation of power under Kim's pro-Soviet regime. Moreover, there is reason to assume that a negotiated agreement with the Soviets to proceed with mutual steps toward unification would have failed. Having

created the foundation for communist leadership and institutions in the northern zone – and the ideological, political and military consolidation of a vehemently pro-Soviet regime on its border – Stalin demonstrated no appetite for unification along more moderate and independent, and therefore less favorable, conditions. No doubt, any unification process would have been extremely violent – although almost certainly less bloody than the catastrophe of the 1950-53 civil war.

But popular democratic leaders in the southern zone, with national authority as anti-Japanese independence fighters, existed in the immediate post-war years, and we will never know if they could have succeeded in establishing a transition regime of national reconciliation. These leaders were rejected by the American authorities, certainly including Hodge himself. His conservative instincts, and understandable concern for the development of pro-American leadership in the south, in the end, trumped his initial plea for a negotiated removal of the border imposed on Korea by the U.S. and Soviet occupying forces.

Act four: *Rhee's success, and Kim's*

The greatest hope for such unified national leadership, however nascent, had come from the Korean People's Republic (KPR), and its most prominent organizer, Yo Un-hyong, a leading anti-Japanese resistance fighter and the most widely supported populist leader in the southern zone. His political convictions were on the left, but he was not a communist. According to Bruce Cumings, "Yo's views were a mixture of socialism, Christianity, and Wilsonian democracy."²²

Yo had reflected the aspirations of the great majority of the Korean people in 1945, as well as the peculiar class structures of Korean society as it emerged from the Japanese grip: at home with the vast peasantry, he also had a bit of the

²² Cumings, 1981, pp. 474-75.

bourgeois gentleman about him. He was an ardent nationalist, too, and the most vocal critic of the retention of the hated Korean police who had done Japanese bidding.”²³

Above all, Yo advocated national unification on the basis of political reconciliation, and his memory is honored in both South and North Korea today. But Yo was rejected by U.S. officials.

From the days prior to the Japanese surrender, the United States and the Soviet Union understood Korea to represent a key battleground in their intensifying ideological and geopolitical struggle. In this process, U.S. occupation authorities increasingly promoted conservative groups (including right-wing extremists) on the basis of their anti-communist zeal and pro-American allegiance, rather than on their popular support among the local population. In this political environment, Syngman Rhee (Yi Sung-man) masterfully utilized his knowledge of American political processes and interests to manipulate U.S. occupying authorities, maneuvering his way to the top.²⁴

With American backing, Rhee used the Japanese-affiliated Korean National Police to eliminate political opposition. He was responsible for the assassination of Yo and the murder of tens of thousands of his supporters, paving the way for his election as President in May 1948. In August the newly elected President Rhee announced the establishment of the Republic of Korea. In the following month in Pyongyang, Kim announced the establishment of the pro-Soviet Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).

²³ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: Norton, 1997) p. 209.

²⁴ Masterfully utilizing his knowledge of American political processes and interests, and his impressive American higher education (B.A., University of Washington; M.A., Harvard; and Ph.D., Princeton), and who to manipulate U.S. occupying authorities, Rhee had steadily emerged as the most successful leader of the conservative nationalists that became increasingly favored by U.S. authorities.

Soviet and American occupation forces soon returned home, with respective regimes in place. Neither government accepted the legitimacy of the other regime or the sovereignty of the other declared republic. Both regimes sought to reunify the Korean nation under their respective leadership, ideology, and armed forces. Thus the 38th parallel, a line hastily drawn on a map by American colonels as a stop-gap measure to address the problem of Japanese surrender in the face of the Soviet's rapid advance, had become, in less than three years, the boundary line of two fiercely-opposed Korean states allied to rival powers in the rapidly-emerging Cold War. Neither government accepted the legitimacy of the other regime or the sovereignty of the other declared republic. Both regimes sought to reunify the Korean nation under its leadership, political ideology and power.

The United States, increasingly disturbed by the reactionary authoritarianism of Rhee's ROK regime, did not provide him with the military capacity to do so. But Kim, after repeated efforts to receive offensive military support from the Soviet Union (and after the Truman Administration had suggested that South Korea did not fall within the U.S. Pacific Command's "defensive perimeter") eventually succeeded in persuading Stalin to back a full-scale DPRK invasion of the south.

Thus began act five of the drama, its bloody dénouement: a fratricidal civil war, internationalized by the introduction of U.S. and Chinese forces. But the 1950-53 war resolved nothing. Its embers continue to burn, and threaten to re-ignite with even greater terror.

But Korea's war cannot be adequately described in isolation from China's war, and simultaneous American intervention in each.

The Chinese Civil War

The Chinese civil war of 1946-1950 had a momentous impact on the future of China and the lives of millions of Chinese people, the balance of power in Asia, and the geopolitics and security of the post-War international system. It is the story of the fateful struggle between the Nationalist forces of Jiang Jieshi and the communist People's Liberation Army of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung).

Americans remember General George C. Marshall for his decisive role in shaping Allied victory in the Second World War, and for the 1947 European assistance plan that bears his name. We may not recall Marshall's representation of the Truman Administration, throughout most of 1946, as a "neutral" mediator between Jiang's Nationalists and Mao's communists in an impressive effort to avert a full-scale civil war. Marshall's vigorous efforts in Nanjing to mediate a deal between Mao and Jiang were initially successful, obtaining an early cease-fire and preliminary agreement on coalition. However, perhaps inevitably given the intense and irreconcilable animosity between these two leaders and their respective political and military organizations (and given Stalin's pressures and incentives in a global security environment of escalating ideological division) the U.S. mediation collapsed. Marshall returned to Washington with no agreement as fighting between the GMD forces and the People's Liberation Army exploded into all-out war.²⁵

Upon the failure of neutral facilitation, the U.S. announced a policy of non-interference vis-à-vis China's internal conflict. As the war continued, Mao's People's Liberation Army increasingly gained the upper hand in battle against Jiang forces. By December, 1948, the Chief of Naval Intelligence informed the CIA Director that "the

²⁵ Westad, pp. 31-32.

situation north of the Yangtze is hopeless and [it] is just a matter of days or weeks before the whole thing folds up.”²⁶ Communist forces took Beijing in February 1949. On April 20th and 21st, tens of thousands of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers crossed the Yangzi river in makeshift boats. Amidst massive defections of Jiang’s Nationalists troops, the GMD strongholds of Nanjing and Hangzhou soon fell to Mao’s forces; in May, the PLA took Shanghai. At this point, Mao feared that U.S. Naval forces, supporting Jiang’s remaining troops, might initiate a counter-offensive in North China. Instead, in early June, the U.S. Navy fled from Qingdao, abandoning Jiang to his own fate.²⁷

In contrast to Korea, the Allied pledges of the Cairo Declaration had been carried out in Taiwan, which was returned to Chinese national sovereignty, under GMD control, following Japan’s defeat. (In effect, this portion of the Cairo Declaration had been Jiang’s gift to himself.) As his armies collapsed on the mainland, Jiang transferred hundreds of thousands of GMD troops and officers to Taiwan. Su Yu, the Acting Commander of the Third Field Army appointed by Mao to lead the PLA’s battle against Jiang’s GMD forces on Taiwan, described the Taiwan invasion as the “the last campaign to end China’s civil war.”²⁸

²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1950: The Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996) pp. 895-96; cited in Westad, p. 218.

²⁷ Westad, pp. 221-253.

²⁸ He Di, “The Last Campaign to Unify China: The CCP’s Unrealized Plan to Liberate Taiwan, 1949-1950, in Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, & Michael A. McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949* (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2003), p. [73]. The following paragraphs follow He Di’s account of the transformation of PLA’s preparation and strategy for the Taiwan invasion during the months between the collapse of GMD forces on the mainland in the summer of 1949 and the indefinite postponement of the campaign following the outbreak of the Korean War

On June 21, 1949, Mao wrote to Su Yu: “We hope that you will complete all preparations during the summer and autumn and occupy Taiwan in the coming winter.”²⁹ In July, with his forces smashed and disintegrating throughout China, the Generalissimo finally abandoned the mainland and fled to Taiwan, carrying with him the gold and silver reserves in the China’s national treasury. At the same time, to prepare for the PLA’s Taiwan invasion, Mao sought and received military support and equipment from the Soviet Union, including 185 fighter planes, and Soviet training for Chinese pilots, thereby initiating the People’s Liberation Army Air Force.³⁰ In October, having destroyed what remained of GMD forces on the mainland, Mao stood atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing’s Tian’anmen Square and declared the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. But in the same month, PLA attacks on the Jinmen (Quemoy) and Dengbu failed – making it clear that the Taiwan campaign would prove more difficult, and require more preparation, than Mao had initially hoped.

In January, 1950, Su Yu recommended that the PLA dramatically expand the planned invasion force to include the entire Third Army (about 500,000 soldiers). In February, Mao again asked Stalin for assistance: to purchase another 628 planes to support the invading force. In May, the Fourth Field Army achieved a major success: the occupation of nearby Hainan, after killing more than 30,000 GMD soldiers. But Jiang successfully transferred more than 70,000 troops back to Taiwan, in addition to 120,000 troops from Zhoushan, to significantly bolster the island’s defense. In response,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Id, at 77. See also Xiaoming Zhang, “Air Combat for the People’s Republic: The People’s Liberation Army Air Force in Action, 1949-1969”, in Ryan, Finkelstein, & McDevitt, 2003, at 91.

Su Yu arranged for the transfer of three to four armies to East China, increasing the PLA troop strength for the Taiwan invasion to sixteen armies.³¹

From his new base in Taipei, Jiang proclaimed that his forces would retake Beijing and establish GMD rule throughout mainland China. Truman was skeptical at best. With resignation, U.S. officials accepted what was perceived to be the inevitable conclusion of the war: Taiwan's conquest by Mao's forces and the island's integration into the PRC-governed Chinese nation. On January 5th 1950, Britain withdrew recognition from Jiang's regime. On the same day, Truman announced: "the United States Government will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa."

On June 24, as Kim Il Sung's Soviet-backed forces pushed south across Korea's 38th parallel, everything changed. Two days later, before the United States committed troops to fight DPRK forces in Korea, it dispatched the Seventh Fleet of the U.S. Pacific Command from the Philippines to the Taiwan Straits in defense of Jiang's regime. China, through its Foreign Minister Chou En-Lai, immediately denounced the intervention as "armed aggression against the territory of China in total violation of the United Nations charter."³² On June 28 Mao addressed the Central People's Government Council:

The U.S. invasion of Asia can only touch off the broad and resolute opposition of Asian people. On January 5, Truman said in an announcement that the United States would not intervene in Taiwan. Now his conduct proves that what he said was false. Moreover, he shredded all international agreements related to the American commitment not to intervene in China's internal affairs. The United States thus reveals its imperialist nature in its true colors.³³

³¹ He Di, 2003, pp. 82-83.

³² Allen S. Whiting, *China Cross the Yalu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 58.

³³ *Id.* at 270.

The assertion that Taiwan is a province of China, and that the completion of the Chinese civil war is an entirely internal issue in which the United States has no right to intervene, has consistently been made by the PRC government, in crisis after crisis, from 1949 until this day.³⁴

“Repair the House Before it Rains”

Just as Kim Il Sung’s invasion shocked the United States, abruptly reversing U.S. policy on the Chinese Civil War, and radically shifting U.S. military imperatives, so the outbreak of the Korean War abruptly and radically realigned PLA strategy – shifting troop deployment from the Taiwan Straights to China’s North Korean border, and shifting strategic planning from the anticipated Taiwan invasion to a heightened defensive posture and contingency planning for what would become the massive introduction of Chinese “Volunteer Forces” into war against U.S, Allied and ROK troops on the Korean peninsula itself.

Shu Guang Zhang has recently documented the operational consequences of this reversal of PLA strategic assessment and planning.³⁵ On July 7, 1950, Zhou Enlai called the PLA’s top commanders to a national security meeting to assess CCP military strategy in response to the eruption of war on the Korean Peninsula. No decisions were made at this early stage concerning the most urgent question: would China send troops or support on behalf of the DPRK? But the *possibility* of Chinese intervention in Korea, and the

³⁴ See e.g. “The Chinese People Are Determined to Liberate Taiwan,” *Remin ribao* (People’s Daily), March 15, 1949; cited Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, 2003, p. 6; We are determined to liberate Taiwan! We are determined to defend the sacred territory and sovereignty of our great motherland!,” Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, April 24, 1969 and “The Chinese people are ready to shed blood and sacrifice their lives to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the motherland,” Premier Zhu Rongji, March 16, 2000; cited in <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/taiwan-d-day.htm>

³⁵ Shu Guang Zhang, “Command, Control and the PLA’s Offensive Campaigns in Korea, 1950-1951” in Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, 2003.

perception of new, urgent threats to the PRC as a result of American and Allied intervention in the war, led to a number of significant military decisions. Zhang explains: “the commanders all considered it “necessary to ‘repair the house before it rains’ (*wei yu choumou*).” Whether or not it became necessary for China to intervene in Korea, the PLA needed to immediately reconfigure its strategic posture and troop deployment to prepare, as swiftly as possible, for such a contingency.

Such preparations required a radical realignment of PLA forces from south China, where they had only recently been assembled for the Taiwan campaign, to a new “northeastern border defense command” to be established in Shenyang, Liaoning Province at China’s Korean border.³⁶ The Fourth Field Army’s 13th Army Group (consisting of the 38th, 39th and 40th Armies) was promptly transferred from south China to provide the initial fighting force for this command. The following week, on July 13, Mao issued a “Resolution on Defending the Security of the Northeastern Border” officially appointing Su Yu as the Northeast Border Defense Army (NBDA) commander – the same officer who had only days before been assigned the task of heading the PLA’s Taiwan invasion command.

In September, the 9th Army Corps -- the core fighting force previously designated for Su Yu’s Taiwan campaign -- was transferred to northern China as a reserve force in the event of Chinese intervention. Mao informed his generals: “Everything in East China should be arranged on the assumption that the United States and Jiang Jieshi might be invading us.”³⁷ This realignment required the PLA to maintain substantial defenses in

³⁶ Ibid. at 91-92.

³⁷ Id. at 88.

the coastal areas of East China, but the previous offensive build-up was brought to an abrupt end.

As Xiaoming Zhang explains in a recent account, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) – which had just been established, with Soviet assistance, for the purpose of providing air support for the PLA and PLA Navy's Taiwan campaign – also abandoned its initial mission as a result of China's overall strategic reconfiguration.³⁸ In the first week of 1951, Chinese troops finally did enter the Korean War in full force, in conjunction with PLAAF air combat fighters. Stalin, who had previously promised to provide air support to PLA soldiers in such a contingency, reneged on his promise – leaving China's land forces entirely dependent upon the PLAAF to the extent that any air cover would be provided at all.³⁹

In retrospect, looking back at Soviet support for Kim Il Sung's offensive to unify Korea by force, Stalin in effect chose Kim over Mao. The U.S. response to that invasion aborted Mao's plans to conquer Jiang's Taiwan. According to Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, "Stalin was profoundly disturbed by Britain's recognition of China and considered it the forerunner of a Sino-American normalization that would ruin all his strategic calculations." In this context, Stalin was troubled that Truman's "announced hands-off policy toward Taiwan" and his "seeming willingness to tolerate a PLA seizure of the island might well lay the basis for a Beijing-Washington

³⁸ Xiaoming Zhang, "Air Combat for the People's Republic: The People's Liberation Army Air Force in Action, 1949-1969" in Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, 2003.

³⁹ *Id.* at 272.

rapprochement.” But as Kim’s invasion of South Korea triggered U.S. intervention in the Taiwan Strait, “[s]uddenly the tables were turned.”⁴⁰

Stalin’s decision to support Kim’s invasion represented a colossal miscalculation in the Korean context: the anticipated communist revolution in the south in support of DPRK troops did not take place; and U.S. forces intervened in support of Rhee’s regime, defeating Kim’s reunification project, after all. Moreover, Stalin’s boycott of the United Nations, to protest its continued recognition of Jiang’s regime, prevented a Soviet veto on the resolution endorsing the use of force against Kim’s invasion. But Russians were not dying in Korea, only Koreans, Chinese and Americans. In the geopolitical power game, Stalin came out on top: Kim’s invasion set off a chain of events that blocked a PLA conquest of Taiwan, destroyed any possibility of U.S.-PRC normalization against the Soviets, and pushed Mao inescapably into Stalin’s camp.⁴¹

Occupied Territories

The story of Korea’s partition is a story of the military occupation of the Korean people, territory and nation. More precisely, it is the story of *six* different military occupations, and the violent tensions between them. As discussed above, the first series of three occupations defined Korea’s sovereignty during the transition from the end of the Second World War to the initiation of the Cold War:

⁴⁰ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 211; see Holloway, pp. 276-78.

⁴¹ See William Whitney Stueck, Jr, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 253. “Perhaps the supreme irony is that the Chinese Communist intervention in Korea served in the long run to undermine the Sino-Soviet alliance. China’s assumption of burdens on the peninsula that Russia was unwilling to risk bolstered Peking’s prestige worldwide and ultimately encouraged Mao to reject Moscow’s leadership of international Communism.... On the other hand, the Sino-American clash hardened Washington’s attitude toward the Mao regime, and prevented an early exploitation of the rift between Peking and Moscow.”

First, the context: Japan's annexation, colonization of Korea, and its brutal repression under Japanese forces from 1910 to Japanese Imperial defeat;

Second, Soviet Red Army occupation, from the 38th parallel north, from mid-August 1945 through 1948, some weeks after the Kim declared the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in September of that year;

Third, American military occupation, from the 38th parallel south, from September 8th 1945 through Rhee's proclamation of the Republic of Korea in August 1948.

Following a brief hiatus, the second series of three occupations defined Korea's sovereignty during the initial months of the Korean War, and determined its future ever since:

The fourth occupation, initiated by the vicious military invasion by Kim Il Sung's DPRK forces, and repressive control of Seoul and nearly all of the south, from the days following June 24 until the end of September, following MacArthur's successful amphibious landing at Inch'on;

Fifth, the comparably destructive military occupation by U.S. and allied forces (under a UN banner and General MacArthur's command) and ROK soldiers and police of Pyongyang, and the entire Korean territory to the Yalu River, in the "rollback war" from October through December 1950;

Sixth, following the December entry into the war by divisions of "volunteer" soldiers of Mao's People's Liberation Army, the occupation of Korea by Chinese forces, in support of Kim's regime, from January 4th, 1951, when Chinese soldiers entered Seoul, through March 7th, when U.S. forces re-took the capital city.

With opposing armies facing each other, once again at the 38th parallel, armistice talks commenced on July 10th. Nevertheless, the war continued for another two years, without territorial gains for either side, at the cost of hundreds of thousands more Korean, Chinese and American lives. (Approximately 45% of the war's casualties occurred after the armistice negotiations began.)⁴³ On January 20, 1953, Eisenhower replaced Truman with a promise to end the war and bring the troops back home. But the armistice talks dragged on, with each day giving greater diplomatic advantage to Mao and Kim, for whom the continued prosecution of war met no domestic challenge.

In the end, the Korean stalemate, and the *de facto* partition of the Korean peninsula, became formalized in the armistice treaty signed at Panmunjom on July 27 by the United States, China and North Korea. Rhee's South Korean regime, which had opposed a negotiated treaty leaving the 38th parallel in place, urged the United States to keep fighting until the Chinese and DPRK forces were defeated, or unconditionally surrendered, in the north.⁴⁵

Three years of war killed between three and four million Korean people.⁴⁶ The survivors were left to face each other, ravaged and bitter, across the same line that divided them before the war began. An armistice ended hostilities, but it brought no reconciliation to the Korean people. Nor did it bring mutual recognition or normalization between rival South and North Korean states. Nor did it bring peace. Rather, it

⁴³ Lee, p. 96.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Glover cites a figure of three million; Steven Hugh Lee a figure of four. Lee, p. 124; Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) p.47. Jon Halliday and Bruce Cumings estimate that over 3 million Korean civilians died, in addition to a half a million DPRK soldiers approximately 100,000 South Korean soldiers. Jon Halliday and Bruce Cumings, *Korea: The Unknown War* (London: Viking, 1988) p. 200.

institutionalized the mutual hostility between the opposing regimes. In effect, the Korean War never ended; it just shifted to a different, if frozen, phase.

North Korea today maintains an army of more than one million soldiers on active duty.⁴⁷ This is more than twice the size of the entire U.S. Army (which in 1999 had approximately 450,000 troops).⁴⁸ A total of more than one million DPRK and ROK troops, more than one million land mines, “abundant chemical weapons, and fortified defensive positions”, has transformed the 38th parallel the most heavily militarized border, and potentially dangerous “tripwire,” in today’s world.⁴⁹ With vital Soviet military and economic support cut to zero by the fall of the U.S.S.R, and Chinese support severely curtailed in the wake of China’s recognition of (and prosperous relationship with) South Korea, the North Korean population has been decimated by famine, and the Kim Jong Il regime has re-doubled its efforts to obtain its long-sought nuclear deterrent.

Mao’s path, 1953-1954

Why did Mao agree, after all, to end the Korean hostilities? This is a question of contentious historical debate. But Eisenhower suggested an answer of his own: “Danger of an atomic war.” According to John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, “[We] had already sent the means to the theater for delivering atomic weapons. This became known to the Chinese through their good intelligence sources and in fact we were not unwilling that they should find out.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Michael O’Hanlon & Mike Mochizuki, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula: How to Deal with a Nuclear North Korea* (New York: McGraw Hill/Brookings 2003) p. 65.

⁴⁸ Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999) p. 124.

⁴⁹ O’Hanlon and Mochizuki, p. 63.

⁵⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 107. Perhaps the key intermediary was Indian Prime Minister Nehru. Lee, pp. 94-95. But I am not aware of any confirmation of this claim suggested by documentation by Nehru, or related Indian archives. Indeed, it is possible that Dulles’s own account of the nuclear threat was significantly

What lessons did Mao take from the Korean catastrophe? On one hand, U.S. “imperialists” had stolen Taiwan from its rightful place in a unified People’s Republic of China, and some one million Chinese “volunteers” perished in the struggle against American forces.⁵¹ On the other hand, PLA intervention successfully blocked the establishment of a potentially threatening U.S.-sponsored Korean regime at China’s border. In a solidified alliance with the Soviet Union, Mao’s People’s Republic proved itself an ideological and military leader in the world communist movement, and a rising, influential power in Asia.

How did these lessons play out in the year following the Panmunjom truce? The Chinese shelled the islands of Quemoy and Matsu, off China’s coast in the Taiwan Straits. In response, the U.S. sent nuclear-capable carrier battle groups to the East China Sea, Jiang’s Nationalist forces sank eight PRC gunboats off the Chinese coast, and Washington signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with Taipei. Mao promptly initiated a program to develop his own arsenal of nuclear weapons.⁵²

How are these lessons remembered today? For Beijing (and Pyongyang as well), the United States was and remains still the enemy who prevented “reunification of the motherland” (under each respective communist party leadership). Yet, in the PRC’s collective memory, the humiliating wound inflicted by the United States in preventing the liberation of Taiwan – and the conviction that this wound will eventually, and indeed

exaggerated; in all events, this set of issues remains in contention and subject to further inquiry and verification. Equally important, in my view, is further research concerning Beijing’s *perception* of threat to Chinese security, including the use of nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal in this period, and how this perception influenced the PRC’s subsequent strategic planning.

⁵¹ Halliday and Cumings, p. 200. 54,246 Americans and 3,194 allied soldiers also died in the Korean War.

⁵² See John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 22-72.

soon, be healed – is accompanied by the nationalist pride sustained by the Chinese Volunteer Forces in defending North Korea against U.S. forces.

Referring to accounts recently published in China, Peter Hayes Gries explains how images and memories of the 1950-53 conflict (remembered as *KangMei YuanChao*: The War to “Resist America and Aid Korea”) has become an important component of a rising ideology of government-manipulated but populist-based nationalism in the People’s Republic of China today.⁵³ Gries refers, for example, to a study issued in 1996 by a State Security Bureau think tank that emphasizes how the Chinese people, “relying on their own strength,” defeated the “world’s number one military power.”⁵⁴ In a forward to the recently published volume on the Korean War, former Chinese Ambassador to the United States Chai Zemin warned America: “Do not forget history.”⁵⁵ At the time of the 1996 crisis in the Taiwan Straits -- during which PLA escalated military exercises escalated and fired missile tests off the shores of Taiwan in response to heightened efforts by Taiwan’s then-President Lee Teng-hui to achieve greater international recognition for Taiwan’s government, in response to which the U.S. Seventh Fleet once again stationed battleships in the Taiwan Straits -- the cover of a popular magazine, *Shenzhen Panorama Weekly*, featured a veteran of the Chinese Volunteer Forces in Korea, wagging his finger. In an unmistakable reference to America, and the lessons of the Korean War, the caption on the photograph read: *we have squared off before!*

⁵³ Peter Hayes Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* at p. 57.

⁵⁵ Chai Zemin, Forward, in Chen Feng, Huang Zhaoyu, and Chai Zemin, *ZhongMei jiaoliang daxiexhen*, p. 69, cited in Gries, p. 58.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The ideologically-based partitions of China and Korea partitions were generated and sustained according to the dictates of politically-driven civil wars framed by the rapidly-emerging Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The causes of these partitions, and the factors contributing to their transformation into what remains as permanent borders, involve multiple actors relating to each other in an enormously complex dynamic; at a minimum, as any proper political scientist might say, the partitions are “overdetermined.” Still, for purposes of this essay, the foreign and security policy of the United States, and specifically U.S. military intervention in Korean and Chinese civil wars, represents the most important thread in an integrated story.

American officials were directly responsible for dividing Korea at the 38th parallel in 1945 – a decision made by Americans without substantial knowledge about Korea, and without consultation with any Koreans. American military intervention in the days immediately following the DPRK’s invasion of South Korea prevented what would otherwise have been a unification of the Korean peninsula under communist rule by means of overwhelming military force, and prevented what would otherwise have been the “final battle” of the Chinese Civil War: a successful “liberation” of Taiwan by Mao’s Peoples Liberation Army, and a reunification of the island into People’s Republic of China. In sum, U.S. intervention represents a catalytic force without which, for better or worse, Korea would in all probability today be unified and Taiwan would be a province of the People’s Republic of China.

I do not intend to assert a normative brief against U.S. policy in either case. To the extent that policy arguments are included in my analysis, they are intended to be

forward-looking, and without a polemical edge. On the contrary, in my understanding, the reasons for U.S. intervention were understandable and legitimate, and perhaps the best (or “least worst”) available option, in each case.

Given the military and political exigencies of the moment, one can imagine a partition some miles north or south of that line, but it is difficult to imagine the U.S. allowing the Soviets to accept the surrender of the Japanese in a united Korea, as it is difficult to imagine the opposite result – a U.S. acceptance of a Japanese surrender following a Soviet withdrawal at the request of the United States. Moreover, surely it was not inevitable that this initial division, intended to be temporary by all concerned, would become the permanent border between two opposing states.

In the Taiwan case, the immediate transfer of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits – initially intended to restrain Jiang Jieshi as well as Mao Zedong from taking advantage of the Korea crisis to launch military action against each other’s regime – can be seen as a legitimate effort to contain the threat of war’s escalation beyond the boundaries of the Korean peninsula.⁵⁶ In addition to these wider political and strategic objectives, as Stueck argues, this move had an immediate, defense military purpose as well: “to protect the southern flank of American forces engaged in Korea.”⁵⁷

In retrospect, U.S. actions in both cases are arguably justified, politically and morally, by the powerful trajectory of democratization achieved in recent decades: Taiwan and South Korea have each emerged from decades of authoritarianism and

⁵⁶ As Stueck’s 1981 study of U.S. policy toward China and Korea during this period argues: “By raising the specter of escalation, ending perhaps in great power confrontation, American officials actually sought to reduce the chances of that eventuality.” William Whitney Stueck, Jr, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 197.

⁵⁷ Id. at 198.

repression into economically powerful, culturally vibrant, and politically dynamic liberal democracies in which freedom of expression is highly developed and protected. We will never know how alternative U.S. policies in 1945 or 1950 would have impacted these societies, decades later, but it is not difficult to imagine less (enormously less) successful results.

Nor do I wish to minimize the role of the Soviet Union as an “independent variable” in the story of Korea’s partition, and its legacy of suffering. Here I entirely agree with William Stueck’s succinct assessment: “Division and Cold War came to Korea first and foremost because of the inability of outside powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, to devise a unification plan that would protect the interests of both.” Indeed, one could legitimately go further to argue that the Soviets and not the Americans ultimately played the decisive role, ultimately dashing the hopes of Truman and Acheson, MacArthur and Hodges for a removal of the 38th parallel on the basis of a U.S.-Soviet “Joint Commission” and four-party trusteeship (U.S., Britain, the U.S.S.R. and China) as negotiated, and announced, in the December 27, 1945 “Moscow Communique.”

As for the Korean War itself, recent scholarship incorporating new information released by the declassification of archives in post-Soviet Russia, and to a lesser but important extent in the PRC as well, only underscores the importance of Stalin’s role in approving Kim Il Sung’s June 1950 invasion plans, and providing necessary military support. This scholarship also presents evidence that Stalin’s decision was made with reference to China as well as to Korea; i.e. that he was well aware of the fatal blow that decision might render to Mao’s plans for the liberation of Taiwan, and that perhaps that was one of his objectives.

However, at the same time we acknowledge the beneficial results of U.S. intervention, and the importance of the Soviet Union as an external actor in the Korean and Chinese conflicts, we would be remiss if we failed to take an honest accounting of the costs incurred, including the costs that continued to be paid. Here we must insist on ascribing fair measure to the catastrophic effects both partitions have sustained – three or four million slaughtered in the Korean War; the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia and beyond; ongoing (if not increasing) conditions of unimaginable risks of security failure and humanitarian catastrophe along Korea's 38th parallel, and between China and Taiwan, today – and reorient current security policy to address the unresolved, destabilizing legacies of each partition as honestly and effectively as possible. These legacies are my primary concern, because they contribute significantly to the extremely dangerous global security dilemmas in which the Northeast Asian region, and the U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. foreign policy must address, and successfully manage, today.

In June 2004, as this paper is completed, neither the Taiwan Straits, nor the Korean Peninsula, enjoys a period of stability. Following the highly contested recent re-election of Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian, Beijing is highly concerned about the risk that Taiwanese leadership will seek to push further toward a declaration of independence. To a large extent, Washington shares this concern; after all, the United States is committed to defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack. Some among the active DPP membership apparently believe that forward moves toward an independence referendum can be successfully protected under the cover of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 – an argument that, in my view (a view that is shared by State Department policymakers) would seriously and perhaps fatally underestimate Beijing's resolve.

On the Korean Peninsula today, the DPRK pushes ever closer toward the achievement of a substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons (in addition to longstanding chemical and biological weapons programs). The six-party talks (with the DPRK, ROK, U.S., PRC, Japan and Russia) continue, with affiliated bi-lateral talks between each of the other parties (with the exception of the United States), but it is difficult to imagine a break-through before the U.S. Presidential elections in November. Meanwhile, the risks of nuclear weapons development in North Korea escalate, combined with the legitimate fear that Pyongyang may find ways to sell or deliver nuclear materials to willing buyers among the many states and terrorist organizations that may be seeking to attack the United States.

In sum, longstanding conflicts in Korea and the Taiwan Straits present grave risks of explosion into a second full-scale war in Northeast Asia, a war that could conceivably, once again, pit the United States against the People's Republic of China – at a time when both China and the U.S. possess enormously more powerful weapons of destruction. In its effort to ensure that such a war never breaks out, the U.S. decision-makers would do well to study and reflect upon the history of U.S. involvement in the 1950-53 war: both the achievements of freedom that involvement eventually delivered to the South Korean and Taiwanese people, and, at the same time, the traumatic and unresolved legacy of partition which has, at least thus far, prevented millions in this troubled region from enjoying security or peace.

In striving toward an effective foreign policy in Northeast Asia, the United States must squarely face the depth of nationalist feeling that continues to inspire Koreans and Chinese toward the achievement of national unification. In addressing the ongoing North

Korean nuclear crisis, we should strengthen our dialogue and relationship with Beijing based upon our shared understanding of the gravity of the situation and our shared fundamental interests -- in a Korean Peninsula without nuclear weapons, and the prevention of a new arms race in Northeast Asia. In addressing the ongoing security crisis in the Taiwan Straits, we must rededicate ourselves to policies and actions promoting stability, peaceful dialogue, patience and, above all, restraint.

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