

American Strategy and the Korean Peninsula, 1945-1953

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"By strategy," John Lewis Gaddis wrote in his seminal book *Strategies of Containment*, "I mean quite simply the process by which ends are related to means, intentions to capabilities, objectives to resources." My intention here is to employ this definition in examining the American course in Korea from the origin of the war there in the country's division in 1945 to the aftermath of fighting in 1953. My approach is to analyze a series of key US decisions, from the one to divide the peninsula at the 38th parallel in August 1945 to the one to conclude a military pact with the Republic of Korea and to issue a "greater sanctions" statement immediately following an armistice in July 1953. My argument is that it took a destructive war before US policymakers successfully matched ends and means in Korea in a manner that ensured future stability. Unfortunately, though, that congruence also ensured indefinite division.

I

The United States intervened in Korea in 1945 to contain Soviet expansion. A State Department paper of October 1943 concluded that,

Korea may appear to offer a tempting opportunity [for Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin]... to strengthen enormously the economic resources of the Soviet Far East, to acquire ice-free ports, and to occupy a dominating strategic position in relation both to China and Japan.... A Soviet occupation of Korea would create an entirely new strategic situation in the Far East, and its repercussions within China and Japan might be far reaching.²

Time reinforced such fears, as China's weakness became increasingly apparent as the war progressed. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt had hoped that China would become one of the world's "four

policemen," replacing Japan as the major power in East Asia to balance the Soviet Union. Yet China remained divided between the Nationalists and the Communists. The former, who made up the only recognized government in the country, were highly corrupt and inefficient. They appeared less and less likely to be able to unite and rule China once Japan was defeated. Furthermore, to defeat Japan at the lowest cost possible to the United States, Roosevelt hoped to lure the Soviet Union into the fray once Germany had surrendered. To achieve this objective, he conceded to Stalin at Yalta in February 1945 the Kurile Islands, the southern half of Sakhalin, and special privileges in Manchuria. In July 1945 Stalin attempted to gain additional concessions on Manchuria in negotiations with the Nationalists. Meanwhile, no firm agreements had been made on Korea, although at Yalta it appears that Stalin accepted Roosevelt's proposal for a multipower trusteeship there. With Soviet forces approaching readiness to enter the war against Japan, the prospect loomed that they would overrun all of Manchuria and Korea, thus putting Moscow in a position to dictate future conditions in those strategic areas.³

Combined with new projections of military events in the western Pacific, this context led Harry S Truman, the new president, to entertain alternative possibilities regarding Korea. When the United States successfully tested an atomic device in mid-July 1945, the prospect emerged more strongly than ever before that Japan would collapse without a ground invasion of its home islands, which was not scheduled to commence until the following November. The Soviet Union, it had been thought, would enter the war well before that and thus would probably control Korea when the fighting stopped. If the war ended sooner, however, say in August, the United States might get troops to Korea to accept the Japanese surrender there before Soviet forces arrived. This scenario became all the more plausible as negotiations proceeded at the Potsdam summit from July 16 to 26, where Stalin mentioned that Soviet forces would not be ready to move against Japan in Manchuria before the middle of the next month.⁴

On August 8, however, the Soviet Union, perhaps anticipating an early surrender by Tokyo in the aftermath of the American use of the atomic bomb against Hiroshima two days before, declared war on Japan. Although the major Soviet military thrust was into Manchuria, by August 11 small Soviet units had entered Korea in the extreme northeast. General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of US forces in the western Pacific, insisted on continuing to mobilize his forces for a massive occupation of Japan rather than diverting major units for a rush to Manchuria or Korea. In any event, Washington believed that the Soviets possessed a sizable head start in occupying the peninsula.

The combination of MacArthur's views and the perception of conditions in Korea led top planners in Washington to reject the possibility of rushing US forces there to occupy the entire country. Rather, they suggested that Truman wire Stalin with a proposal that the 38th parallel serve as a dividing line between Soviet and American occupation forces. Truman agreed and the message was sent on August 15, only hours after Japan surrendered. Stalin accepted the proposal the next day.⁵

The US decision here is subject to criticism on numerous grounds. For one thing, it grossly overestimated the lead of Soviet forces in Korea, which included only two divisions to Japan's nine and were bottled up along the coast in the extreme northeast. Washington was surprised that Stalin readily accepted the 38th parallel, but he might have accepted one still further north so long as it left him a buffer to Soviet territory. To have refused to do so under US pressure would have risked an early airlift of American troops to the peninsula and perhaps even Japanese cooperation with the United States against the Soviets. A second American miscalculation was of the difficulty of occupying Japan, to the accomplishment of which MacArthur insisted on concentrating nearly all of his forces. As it turned out, the Japanese were quite submissive and some US ground units could easily have been spared for a rapid movement into Korea. Although at the time some planners in Washington wanted to pursue this course, its feasibility is much more clear in retrospect.

For our purposes here, the most important point is that the US decision to move into Korea took place without any analysis of an occupation's sustainability over a substantial period of time. Washington assumed that Koreans were initially unprepared to govern themselves and that they were willing to submit, at least temporarily, to outside tutelage in the form of a multipower trusteeship. Washington apparently assumed as well that either political conditions within the United States were such as to enable American forces to stay in Korea indefinitely, or that such a stay was not necessary.⁶ The Americans, in sum, wanted to contain Soviet influence in Korea, but they failed to give close attention to the means required to accomplish that end beyond the short term.

II

By September 1947 this oversight had been rectified. American planners now recognized, first, that many Koreans would actively resist trusteeship or anything else short of independence and, second, that the United States was in a weak position to compete with the Soviet Union for continued influence on the peninsula.⁷ The American zone was in

considerable turmoil, for both political and economic reasons, and the US Congress seemed unwilling to provide adequate funds to sustain the military occupation much longer or to tackle the worsening conditions below the 38th parallel. With US-Soviet relations at an impasse in Korea and worldwide and American commitments to Europe and the Mediterranean rapidly expanding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the United States had "little strategic interest" in maintaining troops in Korea. In offensive operations in war, they believed, the United States would bypass the peninsula. Defensively, its control by the Soviet Union would complicate American "communications and operations in East China, Manchuria, the Yellow Sea, Sea of Japan and adjacent islands," but this problem was best neutralized through air action from Japan and Okinawa rather than with ground operations on the continent of Asia.⁸

If this assessment produced strong pressure for a US withdrawal from Korea, it did not generate a consensus within the Truman administration that the peninsula could easily be written off. The State Department believed that the United States now had a substantial political stake in Korea as a result of its direct confrontation there with the Soviet Union. Because the two great powers had divided the country into occupation zones in 1945, had been unsuccessful in agreeing on terms for unification, and had pursued sharply divergent paths in their zones, the United States could not simply "'scuttle' and run." To do so would convey the message to allies and enemies alike that, when severe difficulties arose in an area for the United States, it was more likely to give up rather than to hang tough. State Department planners conceded that "ultimately the U.S. position in Korea is untenable even with expenditure of considerable... money and effort," but an attempt at graceful withdrawal was necessary to avert a blow to American credibility worldwide. This thinking led to a rejection of a Soviet proposal of late September 1947 for a joint withdrawal from Korea by the end of the year, as this course surely would lead to civil war and an early victory for the better organized leftist forces dominated by the Communists.⁹

The alternative chosen was to take the Korean issue to the United Nations General Assembly, which the United States dominated, in the hope of achieving approval for U.N. sponsored and supervised national elections to create an independent Korea. The Communists might come out on top through such a process, but at least it would be orderly and possess broad international sanction.¹⁰ A possible, even likely, alternative was that the Soviets would refuse to cooperate with the United Nations in their zone, in which case the United States would push for U.N. action in the South alone.¹¹ This action would lead to

creation of an independent South Korea, which would be highly vulnerable to both internal subversion and outside attack. Hopefully independence and U.S. economic and military assistance would foster internal stability in the South and U.N. sponsorship would deter the Soviet Union from taking decisive action against it.

This last scenario was played out during 1948. Early in the year the Soviets refused to permit the U.N. Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), created by a November 1947 resolution of the General Assembly, to operate in their zone. The United States then pushed the First Committee of the General Assembly to approve UNTCOK's operation in the South alone. Elections occurred below the 38th parallel on May 10, 1948, and because all leftists and many of their rightist counterparts boycotted the process, rightist forces led by Syngman Rhee emerged victorious. With UNTCOK approval, they proceeded to form a government, the Republic of Korea (ROK), which came into existence on August 15 with the inaugural of Rhee as its president. Late in the year, the U.N. General Assembly recognized the ROK as the only legitimate government in the territory under its control (meaning below the 38th parallel). Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had created an indigenous Communist government in the North, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Both governments claimed authority over the entire peninsula. In terms of both internal stability and military capability, the DPRK was considerably stronger than the ROK, so much so that Moscow was willing to withdraw its military forces at the end of 1948. The United States had refused to scuttle and run, but its ability to coordinate ends and means remained very much in doubt.¹²

Had the State Department alone constructed, funded, and executed American Korea policy, this coordination probably would have occurred. As it was, the diplomats had to work with a White House and a Congress stingy with funds for defense and a Pentagon faced with expanding commitments in Europe, the key region in the Cold War. Still, with highly unstable conditions prevailing in the ROK in late 1948, the State Department succeeded in delaying the withdrawal of the last 7500 U.S. combat troops from the peninsula. Already it had managed to steer through Congress a bill for economic aid that, unlike legislation the previous year, provided substantial funding for economic rehabilitation in Korea.¹³ The diplomats argued that, for the United States to simply leave the ROK to its fate after having taken the lead in its creation through the United Nations, would have a major psychological impact throughout East Asia and within the international organization.¹⁴

III

Yet in the spring of 1949 the U.S. government finally resolved to remove its remaining troops from Korea. A variety of domestic and international conditions produced this result.

U.S. military leaders were deeply concerned about evolving conditions both at home and abroad. In East Asia, the Communists were marching to victory in China with the assistance of tens of thousands of North Korean soldiers. The return of those soldiers to the DPRK would give it a huge advantage over the ROK, one which 7500 American soldiers in the South could not override. Thus those soldiers were likely to find themselves in an increasingly vulnerable position.¹⁵

Equally important, Washington remained glued to a Europe-first strategy and was on the verge of committing the United States, through the North Atlantic Treaty, to the defense of the western half of the continent. With tensions high in Europe over the Soviet blockade of the western sectors of Berlin, military planners were anxious to strengthen American reserves at home so as to prepare for an emergency across the Atlantic. The U.S. war plan at the time envisioned a conflict breaking out in Europe, with the initial American effort concentrating on an atomic air offensive against Soviet territory and on maintaining a foothold on the continent, perhaps at the Pyrenees, and in the Middle East. In Asia operations would be restricted to a "strategic defensive" based on offshore islands.

This outlook grew partly out of the military's natural inclination to think in terms of preparing for a total war like World War II, but it gained reinforcement from the strict spending limits set by the president and Congress. This was an age in which people took balanced budgets and low taxes most seriously, and President Truman had domestic priorities to advance, which cost money. Moreover, atomic weapons appeared to provide for defense of America's foreign interests on the cheap. The State Department reluctantly went along with the desire of military leaders to withdraw from Korea. Economic and political conditions had improved somewhat in South Korea and, by some estimates, DPRK and ROK military forces were relatively balanced. The last American combat troops withdrew in June.

The diplomats did exact a price. The U.S. military advisory group in Korea was expanded and made permanent. Arms aid to the ROK continued, and now for an army of 65,000 rather than 50,000. In early June the Truman administration presented to Congress an economic assistance bill calling for \$ 150 million to the ROK for the approaching fiscal year and its accompanying message from the president likened the aid program to that for western Europe. Finally, the State Department prepared a resolution for the fall session of the U.N.

General Assembly that would extend the life of the U.N. commission on Korea created the previous year. Hopefully the presence of this observer group would help to discourage the North Koreans from launching a major attack.

Despite his and his department's ongoing concern about Korea, Secretary of State Dean Acheson failed to develop a course that deterred the Soviets from giving North Korea the green light or enabled the ROK to resist the enemy once it struck. The explanation rests in part on inattentiveness in the face of higher priorities in Europe and the limitations on intelligence, which viewed military attacks from the Communists as more likely against Taiwan and in Indochina than against South Korea. In the former cases, the United Nations was not involved and there was no Soviet-American agreement dividing the territory. In addition, American ground forces were stationed in Japan, nearby Korea but hundreds of miles from Taiwan or Indochina. In any event, the balance of conventional military power on the peninsula itself was not altogether clear and the North Koreans still were thought to have a chance of subverting the ROK through infiltration and guerrilla warfare. What information did come in of more aggressive North Korean intentions and military superiority tended to be from ROK officials who, it was feared, merely wanted more military aid so they themselves could take the offensive.¹⁶

Domestic and bureaucratic politics also contributed to American unpreparedness in Korea. Despite the administration action of June 1949, new economic assistance was not passed by Congress until February 1950, and then only after the House of Representatives had rejected the legislation the previous month. Outside the State Department, the ROK had virtually no constituency in the United States and some members of the legislative branch were perfectly willing to hold aid to Korea hostage to the same for Taiwan. Acheson preferred no aid to Taiwan because he thought it would not save the island from the Communists while throwing them further into the hands of the Soviets. He remained willing to provide limited assistance, however, if it would help secure his Korean program. The Pentagon, in contrast, wanted more aid for Taiwan and, with the partial exception of the Army, could not have cared less about Korea.¹⁷

Under the circumstances, it is understandable that Acheson did not do more on Korea than he did. He devoted considerable space to the peninsula in his National Press Club speech of January 12, 1950, hedging on the critical issue of U.S. aid to the ROK in the event it was attacked. Areas outside the American island defense perimeter in the western Pacific could not be guaranteed. In fact, "initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it;" but then they could look to "the

commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations, which so far has not proved a weak reed to lean on by people who are determined to protect their independence against outside aggression."¹⁸ Given the low level of defense spending and the military view that Korea was relatively unimportant, the most he could was attempt ambiguity.

Ambiguity was not enough in the face of developments in northeast Asia. Unknown to Acheson, North Korean Premier Kim Il-sung had been pressing Stalin to approve an attack on the ROK since the previous March.¹⁹ Stalin had demurred, only to begin to rethink the matter early in the new year. By this time, the Americans had withdrawn combat troops from the ROK, the Communists had emerged victorious on mainland China, and they had returned two divisions of Korean soldiers to the DPRK and established the People's Republic in Beijing. Communist leader Mao Zedong was now in Moscow negotiating a political-military alliance with the Soviets. With signals emanating from Washington that the United States would not commit troops to South Korea's defense, Stalin wired Kim Il-sung on January 30 that he was now willing to give favorable consideration to his desire to unite the peninsula by force.²⁰ Early the next month, the Soviet leader approved Kim's request for modern arms to equip three new North Korean army divisions.²¹ At the end of March, he welcomed Kim to Moscow for lengthy discussions of the project. Stalin dwelled on the improved "international environment" created by the Communist victory in China and the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance concluded in February.²² With Mao's approval and assurances of aid, the arrival of heavy equipment from the Soviet Union in the spring, and Soviet assistance in developing plans for a conventional attack, the DPRK was ready by late June to launch what it hoped would be its final campaign against the ROK.

Given what we now know of Stalin's deliberations regarding a North Korean attack on the ROK, it was a tragic mistake for the United States to remove its last combat troops from Korea in 1949. Their maintenance there, along with the presence of US troops and air power in Japan and Okinawa, probably would have deterred the Soviet leader from giving Kim Il-sung the green light to attack south. And it is hard to believe that the presence of 7500 more troops in the United States would have tipped the scales in favor of NATO in defending western Europe against a determined Soviet attack.

Yet even without US combat troops in Korea, it remains possible that Stalin could have been deterred, as we know that he refused to give Kim the go-ahead until he thought a major American military intervention unlikely. Well publicized military exercises by American

forces in Japan and Okinawa for deployment to Korea, combined with inspection tours of the peninsula by top military brass from Washington, might well have conveyed a message of US commitment that would have led Stalin to shy away from supporting Kim's designs. That no such activities occurred reflects the poor coordination of policy both in Washington between the State Department and the Pentagon and within the Pentagon itself, and between Washington and Tokyo, where General MacArthur reigned as in many ways a virtually independent sovereign.

IV

Why, in the face of the North Korean attack, did the United States suddenly return ground forces to the peninsula? The first point to be made is that the action did not represent a reversal of policy, but rather the end of one of ambiguity. The option of sending troops back into Korea had been considered in an army paper in June 1949. Then it was concluded that such action would be "unsound militarily" but possibly "necessary on the basis of political considerations...."²³ No decision emerged on the paper at the time, probably in part because there appeared to be no pressing need for one and in part because divisions existed on the matter within the executive branch. Acheson's ambiguity in his National Press Club speech six months later grew out of the same circumstances.

At the end of June 1950, ambiguity was no longer possible. For the first time in American policy circles, Korea was at center stage. By early on June 30, it was clear that, unless the United States committed troops, the North Koreans would overrun the South within weeks. Several other things also were clear. First, the ROK was threatened not because it was falling apart from within or it had launched an attack northward and was now suffering the consequences, but because DPRK forces had initiated an all-out attack southward, one which could not have been executed without Soviet help. This action represented aggression, a flagrant violation of the Soviet-American agreement of August 1945 and of UN resolutions recognizing the legitimacy of the ROK. Second, General MacArthur, the commander in the field, believed that two US combat divisions from Japan, joined by American air and naval forces in the area, could repulse the attack—and they could do so without compromising the defense of Japan. Third, there was no indication of direct Soviet or Chinese Communist intervention in Korea or of impending Soviet or Soviet proxy moves in other, more important areas. The conflict in Korea appeared to be an isolated event, thus justifying action outside the old category of total war. Fourth, broad support existed among allies abroad for strong American

measures, and if anything such support was even stronger at home. Under these conditions—which could not have been anticipated in advance—decisive action was warranted, Acheson thought, "as [a] symbol [of the] strength and determination of [the] west." To do less would encourage "new aggressive action elsewhere" and demoralize "countries adjacent to [the] Soviet orbit."²⁴

The commitment of troops to Korea represented more of a departure from past thinking to the Joint Chiefs than to the State Department. Why, then, did military leaders go along? First, they did so for the reasons stated above, but in their case the fourth was perhaps the most important of all. Not only did President Truman convey from the start the sentiment that whatever needed to be done to save South Korea must be done; he chose the hawkish Secretary of State Acheson to lead deliberations through the crisis. And for the first time Congress appeared to be solidly behind a major commitment to Korea. Left entirely alone to deliberate, the Joint Chiefs might have chose differently. Certainly they did not lead the tide for intervention. With that tide so strong, however, they were unwilling to demur.²⁵

The Americans took on a risky venture at the end of June 1950, but it did not represent an unreasonable coordination of ends and means. To be sure, it took some eight divisions to repulse the North Koreans rather than the two originally estimated by MacArthur, and this meant dipping into reserves at home. The key considerations in justifying the initial commitment, in addition to those outlined above, are, first, that the United States maintained a strong superiority in nuclear weapons and delivery capabilities over the Soviet Union and, second, it enjoyed similar superiority in mobilization capacity. All indications were that Moscow was not ready to start a global war and that, if it did, the United States would have a better than even chance of prevailing.

The weight of judgment shifts to the negative side, however, once we turn to the US decision in the fall of 1950 to seek unification of the peninsula by force.

V

It did not take long after the commitment of U.S. troops to Korea for planners in Washington to begin consideration of altering the initial objective of restoring the 38th parallel. By mid-July ROK President Syngman Rhee had stated publicly that North Korea's aggression "had obliterated the thirty-eighth parallel and that no peace and order could be maintained in Korea as long as the division [of the peninsula] ... remained."²⁶ In a private meeting in Tokyo with two members of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General MacArthur, the recently appointed commander of U.N. forces in Korea, opined that North Korean forces

must be destroyed and the country reunited. The United States could prevent the Chinese or the Soviets from intervening by using atomic weapons to create a radioactive barrier along the northern boundary of the peninsula.²⁷ Although the use of atomic weapons for such a purpose never received serious consideration in Washington, the executive branch soon engaged in serious debate over the merits of expanding the stated objective in Korea. Whether it was because of the need to punish aggression in order to deter it, to reverse "the dangerous strategic trend in the Far East," or to take the offensive in the Cold War in general, important elements in both the Pentagon and the State Department believed that military action to unite Korea should not be ruled out.²⁸

Still, by mid-August it was widely accepted that the Soviet Union and/or China would probably send forces into that country to prevent an attempt to unite it by hostile forces. Since for the moment the commitment of U.S. forces to Korea had disrupted the American capacity to execute its war plan against the Soviet Union, a consensus existed that it was too early to reach a decision on the desirability of any U.N. ground operations north of the 38th parallel. NSC 81, approved by President Truman on September 11, reflected this sentiment at the same time that, in phraseology, it revealed a predisposition toward boldness. A U.N. ground offensive should be extended into North Korea "provided that at the time of such operations there has been no entry into [that area of]... major Soviet or Communist Chinese forces, no announcement of an intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations [there] militarily."²⁹

The Inchon landing of September 15 and its follow-up over the next two weeks magnified the predisposition exponentially. MacArthur's flanking operation at the port of Seoul and the subsequent breakout of U.N. forces from the Pusan perimeter abruptly reversed the tide of battle, magnified psychological and domestic political pressures on the Truman administration to move forward quickly, and reduced the time available for the Communist side to signal the enemy on the risks of expanding ground operations beyond the 38th parallel. Thus, when the signals finally were sent, the momentum in Washington for a U.N. advance into the North overwhelmed any lingering sense of caution. That caution did not return to the fore until the Chinese had launched a counteroffensive that sent U.N. forces reeling and even threatened again their expulsion from the peninsula.³⁰

The case for a U.S.-supported effort to reunite Korea was by no means inconsequential. For centuries, the peninsula had been united and a denial of Rhee's determination to bring it about would have created serious strains in the American relationship with the ROK. Furthermore, the elimination of division, however difficult, would have

eradicated a tense situation within the country that indefinitely left open the prospect of resumed fighting. The punishment of aggression in this case presumably would have produced some deterrent value at other times and in other places.

Yet the negatives outweighed the positives here, at least from a broad strategic standpoint. To the United States, Korea was a secondary area in a secondary theater. The primary area in that theater was Japan, and Korea's unification was not essential for its protection. An effort to unify Korea would stretch U.S. supply lines in the region and give China, still the second team on the enemy side, an opportunity to intervene under circumstances that would engage large American forces on the peninsula for an indefinite period. True, a divided peninsula would perpetuate the need for a U.S. military presence there, but establishment of a defensible line in the general area of the 38th parallel, combined with a strong effort to build up ROK forces, would have provided, over time, a good chance for stability at considerably less risk of overextension. With U.S. war plans against the primary enemy already compromised because of the direct military involvement in Korea, Washington was in a precarious position to take on an expanded objective there. This was all the more the case because the support of allies in the primary theater of the Cold War, namely Europe, was far more shallow on the question of unification than on the matter of the ROK's defense, a fact which became clear in negotiations at the United Nations in early October and even more so a month later, when the first signs of large-scale Chinese intervention appeared.³¹

If Washington permitted means and ends to get seriously out of balance in the fall of 1950, it quickly resumed its balancing act in the winter of 1950-1951 as the magnitude of Chinese intervention on the peninsula and the level of perturbation of European allies became clear. The Truman administration retreated early on to the objective of saving the ROK and held to it through a nasty public dispute with General MacArthur.³² Only with the emergence in office in early 1953 and a continued deadlock in armistice negotiations did top people on the American side seriously contemplate expanding the objective once again.³³ Fortunately for the prospects of avoiding a broader war, the Communists chose to end the stalemate by accepting the U.S. position on the POW issue.

VI

A major fear of American policymakers throughout the war was that, once concluded, the United States would again retreat into unpreparedness, thus leaving South Korea and other areas vulnerable. Joining that fear, however, was a determination to avoid past

mistakes—and that determination proved adequate for the construction of a consistently effective deterrent against a resumption of war in Korea. The United States, to be sure, greatly reduced its military presence on the peninsula, but it did so over time and, unlike in 1949,³⁴ never was there a serious question of complete withdrawal. Even in the late 1970s, when President Jimmy Carter pushed for a total withdrawal of ground troops, he insisted that U.S. air forces would remain in Korea. In that case, the uproar in the United States over the prospective withdrawal of the former alone was enough to force Carter's retreat. The United States had learned well the lesson that, as an emerging adversary put it in 1949, "preparedness eliminates mishaps." Never again would American defense spending become so anemic that the U.S. position in Korea seemed expendable in the face of more critical interests elsewhere.

U.S. deterrence in Korea, however, was not solely dependent on the continuing presence there of American forces. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the United States negotiated a defense pact with the ROK, one that stands to this day. It also issued, along with other U.N. members contributing forces to the peninsula, a "greater sanctions statement" that threatened a war beyond Korea if the other side initiated a resumption of hostilities.³⁵

This survey of American strategy in Korea from 1945 to 1953 serves to remind us of the evolutionary nature of the U.S. rise to global policeman in the aftermath of World War II. The demobilization of American armed forces during 1945 and 1946 and the absence of any major rebuilding effort over the next three years left the country with a serious disjunction between its growing involvement and commitments abroad and its military strength in being. It took the North Korean attack of June 1950 and quite possibly the Chinese intervention in the fall to largely eliminate that problem. That it was eliminated is indicated both by the sustained buildup of NATO forces in Europe during and after the war and by a similar buildup of allied forces in Korea plus a formal statement of an ongoing commitment of the United States to the defense of the ROK.

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Notes

1. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), viii.
2. "Possible Soviet Attitudes Toward Far Eastern Questions," October 2, 1943, Box 119, Records of Harley A. Notter, 1939-1945, Record Group 59, National Archives II, College Park, Md.
- 3.1 use "strategic areas," as do the officials in the State Department document quoted above, to mean ones possessing major material or human resources and/or locations advantageous from which to project power into other territories.

In addition to pressing the Nationalists for concessions in Manchuria beyond the Yalta accords, by the summer of 1945 the Soviets were dealing with areas they occupied in Eastern Europe in a manner that did not inspire confidence in Washington regarding Moscow's willingness to uphold prior agreements.
4. Michael C. Sandusky, *America's Parallel* (Alexandria, Va.: Old Dominion Press, 1983), 176-78, 180-85.
5. *Ibid.*, 248-52; Erik Van Ree, *Socialism in One Zone: Stalin's Policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (New York: Berg, 1989), 62-64; U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, vol. 6, *The British Commonwealth, the Far East* (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1969), 657-60, 1039 (henceforth volumes in this series will be referred to as *FRUS*).
6. I say "apparently" here because I have seen no documents indicating that US planners discussed or thought through the implications of an initial occupation of Korea by American forces.
7. This issue is treated in depth in my *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 75-88.
8. *FRUS, 1947, 6: 817-18.*
9. *FRUS, 1947 6: 820-21.*
10. For estimates that the process might end in Communist domination of South Korea, see *ibid.*, 775-76, 794-96, 803-807.
11. Based on my interviews with State Department officials W. Walton Butterworth (November 16, 1971), Dean Rusk (July 24, 1972), Philip Jessup (June 6, 1972), and Niles Bond (July 30, 1977), I conclude that no consensus existed within that agency regarding prospects for Soviet acceptance of U.N.-sponsored elections in the North.
12. For a fuller treatment, see my *Road to Confrontation*, 88-105.
13. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee, *Korean Aid, Hearings* S. 938, 81st Congress, 1st session, June 8-23, 1949 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), 37, 57, 105.
14. See NSC 8 in *FRUS, 1948, 6: 1164-69.*
15. For details and documentation for this and the next four paragraphs, see my *Road to Confrontation*, 153-59.

16. See *ibid.*, 164-70. The border clashes along the 38th parallel of 1949 were quite disturbing to the Americans, who recognized at least partial South Korean responsibility.
17. *Ibid.*, 140-43, 146, 158, 161-62.
18. *Bulletin of the Department of State*, 22(January 23, 1950): 116.
19. Evgeniy P. Bajanov and Natalia Bajanov, "The Korean Conflict, 1950-1953: Most Mysterious War of the 20th Century-Based on Secret Soviet Archives," English translation of unpublished manuscript based on the Presidential Archives of the former Soviet Union, 17-18. Henceforth, this document will be identified as "Korean." I wish to thank Professor Ohn Chang-il of the Korean Military Academy, Seoul, Republic of Korea, for providing me with a copy of this manuscript.
20. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, *Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project*, 5(Spring 1995): 9. Henceforth, this journal will be referred to as Bulletin.
21. "Korean," 38.
22. Kathryn Weathersby, "'Should We Fear This': Stalin and the Dimensions of the Korean War," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association annual meeting, January 2000 (copy in author's possession), 13-14.
23. *FRUS*, 1949, 7: 1047, 1054-55.
24. Acheson to Ambassador Alan Kirk in Moscow, June 28, 1950, Record Group 84, National Archives II, College Park, Md.
25. For fuller coverage of the US intervention, see my Road to Confrontation, 177-98.
26. *FRUS*, 1950, 7: 373.
27. J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 82-83.
28. See my *Road to Confrontation*, 202-206.
29. *FRUS*, 1950, 7: 716; also my *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 62-63.
30. See my *Korean War*, 85-162.
31. See my *Korean War*, 91-96, 111-19.
32. *Ibid.*, 127-203.
33. *Ibid.*, 320-25.
34. The adversary was Mao Zedong. See Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War* (Lawrence, Ks.: Regents Press of Kansas, 1995), 36.
35. See my *Korean War*, 359-61.