
The George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History

Introduction to the Korean War



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FROM his pedestal above the twelve lanes of traffic moving by fits and starts along King Sejong Boulevard in Seoul, the statue of Admiral Yi Sun-shin watches the Korean people enjoy the dubious luxuries of prosperity and peace. However perilous that well-being sometimes seems at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Republic of Korea stands as a sturdy example of postcolonial survival. In a sense the Republic of Korea—*Daehan Minguk*—and its socialist sister the Democratic People's Republic of Korea—are “new nations,” but they are built on the wreckage of a failed traditional society, forty years of Japanese colonialism, the leaching effect of Japan's wars (1937–45), and the trauma of political division and revolutionary social change. Koreans who were young in 1945 can hardly believe they live in the same county. But always there is the memory of “the war.”

The Korean people know war. One bit of their lore is that the country has been invaded at least six hundred times in the last three millennia, although the counting includes incidents of piracy, minor punitive expeditions, and naval encounters along Korea's long and island-dotted coastline. Nevertheless, the Koreans have a record of victimization that rivals that of the Jews, Poles, and Irish. Four hundred years ago Admiral Yi Sun-shin battled the fleets of the Japanese tyrant Hideyoshi Toyotomi, but despite three miraculous naval victories—won by the novel armored “turtle boats” of revered memory—Admiral Yi could not prevent Hideyoshi's armies from ravishing Korea's villages, farmlands, and precious Buddhist temples. As Yi wrote in despair: “The mountains and the rivers tremble . . . blood dyes hills and streams.”¹ According to Korean

1. Yi Ch'unghmu-gong Chonso, vol. 1 of *Imjin Changch'o: Admiral Yi Sun'sin's Memorials to Court*, translated by Ha Tae-hung and edited by Lee Chong-young (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1981), 197.

legend, the stone in the forehead of the Great Buddha of Sökkuram Grotto turns red every time Japan threatens to invade. It would be appropriate to have a similar warning system for China.

The Kingdom of Chosön—"The Land of the Morning Calm"—rose from the rubble of civil wars and Chinese invasions in 1392 and survived until 1910, but the ruling dynasty, founded by General Yi Song-gye, could never escape an awful geopolitical reality: the Korean peninsula served as the military marches for both Japan and China—and for waves of Mongols and Manchurians bent on visiting Japan. When the divisions of the Chinese People's Volunteers Force (*Renmin Zhiyuanjun*) swept into the Han River valley in January 1951, they trod the same ground ravaged by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. When the Fifth Marines, a regiment of the U.S. 1st Marine Division, crossed the Han River on 20 September 1950 on its way to Seoul, the Marines marched by the monument of Haengjujuansong fortress, the site of a desperate and futile battle against the Japanese in 1592. There are few battlefields in Korea that are the site of only one past engagement. Koreans compare themselves to a school of shrimp caught between two whales. Whether the whales are fighting or making love—not to mention feeding—the shrimp have a short life expectancy.

The nineteenth century brought a new set of military adventurers to Korea: the Europeans and the now-Europeanized Japanese. On Kanghwa-do (island) at the mouth of the Han River, one can find monuments and restored fortifications dedicated to the valiant but out-gunned Koreans who opposed French, American, and Japanese naval expeditionary forces in 1866, 1871, and 1875. The two major regional wars that sealed Korea's fate as a Japanese colony—the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5)—included battles on Korean soil or in Korean waters. Ironically, neither of the world wars made Korea a battlefield for foreign powers. A worse fate awaited the Korean people, a civil war of such devastating proportions that one had to look back to the Japanese invasions of the 1590s for appropriate precedents in suffering.

Although Korean folklore focuses upon the tragedy of foreign invasions, Korean history is hardly free of civil strife. The Korean people do not need the encouragement of foreign devils to fight each other. The Yi dynasty came to power in a war that followed the collapse of the Kingdom of Koryo (to which North Korea still traces its own legitimacy), which had succeeded in turn the Kingdom of Unified Shilla. The Shilla dynasty (based in Kyongju, today a national historical shrine in the Republic of Korea) had triumphed over an earlier Koguryŏ kingdom and the rival Paekche kingdom, based in the modern Cholla provinces of southwestern Korea, an area notorious for its rebelliousness.

Even when the dynastic and foreign wars faded in severity in the

nineteenth century, the progressive erosion of Korean traditional society—based on hereditary land-holding and Confucian family and social deference patterns—brought a series of populist agrarian uprisings that fused economic discontent with millennialism of a distinctly Asian cast. The Yi Dynasty faced popular revolts of serious proportions in 1812 and 1862. Like the Taipings in China, the Korean rebels sought some sort of rejuvenation that drove off foreign-based modernity and restored some perfect (imagined) past of social harmony. In Korea the last and most significant of these revolts—the Tonghak (“Eastern Learning”) Rebellion of 1895—led the Yi dynasty to seek aid from Russia, China, and Japan, thus setting the stage for its own demise. Apparently when the whales are otherwise engaged, the shrimp eat each other.²

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For all these Korean wars, the war of 1950–53 still rises above all the other communal and international violence just as the great mountain of Paek Tu-san rises above all the other mountains as a symbol of Korean identity and endurance. For American historians, the war of 1950–53 could be either forgotten or misunderstood. Even within the context of World War II and the Cold War era, the Korean War was usually just ignored. Such a cavalier treatment simply reflected a historiographical phenomenon, which was to insist that what really made wars memorable was their lasting impact upon national *domestic* development, an insularity that has been the bane of American intellectual inquiry throughout the twentieth century. The American Revolution and the Civil War (or War of the Rebellion or the War Between the States) took their significance from their impact on the course of American socio-economic history. The War with Mexico or the War with Spain, forever important in the history of American foreign relations, are relatively unstudied except among eccentric American intellectuals and the whole Spanish-speaking world. World War II is the great exception since its impact on both American domestic life and international relations has been obvious, although the critique of American performance in that war is still based on domestic (corporatist-revisionist) criteria worthy of the Jeffersonian isolationists. The Vietnam War (1958–75) confused American thinking even further since it became a war lost by the United States and its Vietnamese allies that had virtually no international ramifications, unless one is Cambodian. Yet that war produced a social and national revolution in Vietnam and a generational political trauma in the United

2. Korean Overseas Information Service, *A Handbook of Korea* (Seoul: Hollym, 1990); Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation* (Seoul: Hollym, 1988); Peter Hyun, *Koreana* (Seoul: Korea Britannica, 1984); and Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt, comps., *Korea: A Historical and Cultural Dictionary* (Durham, U.K.: Curzon, 1999).

States. Caught between the whales of World War II and the Vietnam War, the Korean War shrank to shrimp-like proportions in the American consciousness.³

The historical significance of the Korean War must be sought elsewhere than in the popular memory of Americans, even those who fought in Korea. With an estimated three million-plus deaths of all nationalities, the Korean War still ranks behind only the two world wars as the most costly war of the twentieth century in terms of human lives lost. Even if some other conflict eventually lays a stronger claim to this dubious distinction of deadliness, the Korean War will still rank with the worst of the conflicts that followed World War II, wars that killed an estimated twenty million by the century's end.

In the history of international conflict the Korean War is one of many wars of decolonization and postcolonial political succession that swept away four centuries of European (and Japanese) imperialism. With all the World War II belligerents except the United States prostrated by their wartime losses, the client states of the Middle East and the colonies of Asia and Africa faced an unprecedented opportunity to declare their independent existence. "Declaring" often proved easy compared to the challenge of "being" a new nation, but rational policies and reforms seldom drove the "freedom fighters" of the 1940s and 1950s. Like generations of rebels before them, the leaders of "the wars of national liberation" proved more adept at taking power than governing.

Wars of postcolonial independence and political succession swept Asia in the wake of the dual collapse of European and Japanese colonialism. Only the Kingdom of Thailand, which maintained its delicate independence by playing Great Britain and France off against one another in the Southeast Asian version of "The Great Game," escaped a divisive civil war. The general pattern was first to drive out the European occupying power with terrorism and guerrilla warfare, balanced with deft negotiations and promises of useful future (usually economic) relationships. Often the independence fighters based their appeal and political organization on their resistance to the Japanese occupations—and sometimes their collaboration with the Japanese. Nothing prevented the independence fighters from fighting each other either since just who would succeed the banished foreigners carried high stakes. Not surpris-

3. See, for example, Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); John Shy, "The American Military Experience: History and Learning," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1 (Winter 1971): 205–28; David M. Kennedy, "War and the American Character," *Stanford Magazine* 3 (Spring-Summer 1974): 14–18, 70–72; Reginald C. Stuart, "War, Society, and the 'New' Military History of the United States," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 8 (Spring 1977): 1–10; and Edward M. Coffman, "The New American Military History," *Military Affairs* 84 (January 1984): 1–5.

ingly, the withdrawing powers had strong preferences about just which nationalist leaders replaced the colonial government. By definition the Asian nations were dealing with revolution. Whatever new socio-economic system emerged after independence, it would not be premodern, and it would transform the village, communal, agrarian culture that characterized all of Asia except Japan.

In terms of long-term historical significance the Chinese civil war, which began in the 1920s and ended in the spring of 1950 with the conquest of Hainan Island, dominates the history of the Asian wars of national liberation, but it was only one of many. The division of British India into India and Pakistan turned communal violence into internal and international conflict that has not ended in more than fifty years; Pakistan, still stung by the loss of its Bengali "eastern state," faces India after three wars. India has fought pro-Pakistani China four times in the Himalayas and supports the Tamil rebellion in the island-state of Sri Lanka. It has attempted to crush Sikh dissidents for twenty years. Four wars finally brought an independent Laos, Cambodia, and unified Vietnam with Communist Vietnam regulars finally swaying the balance in Laos and Cambodia.

The Indonesians fought off an Anglo-Indian-Dutch occupation force in 1945-47, but waited until the 1960s to kill each other in the hundreds of thousands in a war-of-succession waged between the Communists and Moslem nationalists, whose generals replaced the "father of his country" for almost forty years, Achmet Sukarno. Burma went into geo-political reclusiveness (and took the name Myanmar) in part through the ravages of continued wars between Burmese factions and non-Burmese mountain peoples (the Shan, the Chin, the Kachin) with grievances that are now at least over fifty years old. Contemporary Malaysia and Singapore were born in twenty years of guerrilla warfare that accompanied independence and pitted the Moslem-Malay majority (favored by the British) against a Chinese (largely Communist-led) minority. Even with independence guaranteed by the United States, the Philippines had to endure (and still endures) a civil war between the *americanistas* or prowestern nationalists and the Communist leaders of the *Hukbalahaps*, not to be confused, of course, with the continuing warfare against all Filipinos conducted by the Moslem tribes of Mindanao. Only Japan's timely surrender in 1945, followed by an occupation monopolized by the United States and the prompt but modest reform of some Japanese institutions, may have spared Japan its own civil war.

The contemporaneous history of conflict in the states between the Mediterranean and Indus River adds further insight into the trans-regional phenomenon of postcolonial wars of political succession. The first collapse came in World War I, not World War II, with the defeat and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of modern

Turkey after a civil war and multinational foreign interventions in the 1920s. Since the French and British "special relationships" that emerged in the 1920s allowed native rulers to lead "independent" countries, the post-1945 transition to truer independence was less bloody, but certainly not peaceful as British veterans of the Palestinian occupation, 1945–47, can attest. With the independence of Israel setting the stage for four major wars and sixty years (and counting) of conflict in the Levant, the region was probably doomed to endless war. The Arab-Israeli confrontation, however, does not define the history of war and revolution in the Arab and Persian world. With the exception of the House of Saud, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and some of the smaller sheikdoms and sultanates of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, there is no other successor regime in the region that has maintained itself and none without civil repression or foreign intervention. The al-Sabahs would be, for example, gone from Kuwait without the international intervention of 1990–91. The monarchs of Egypt and Ethiopia are gone, along with the first generation of military strongmen and clan leaders of Eritrea, Somalia, and the Sudan. The pro-European elites of Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq are as departed as King Nebuchadnezzar, and the Pahlevi family's grasp on the Peacock Throne of Iran is just as dead as that of Darius and Xerxes. Who remembers the names of the last kings of Libya and Afghanistan?⁴ The postcolonial wars since 1945 may not change geography, but they have certainly reshaped the political terrain outside Europe and North America.⁵



Outside isolated rural villages in central Korea the enterprising traveler can still find an occasional pair of giant wooden, carved figures that look suspiciously to an American like totem poles. They are *changsung*, symbols of the dualism of good and evil and a plea to the mystical forces of nature to protect the village. Decorated to represent a male spirit and a female spirit, the *changsung* do not look friendly, certainly not to each other, but their powers are supposed to work in concert to protect the people. Like the *changsung*, two political movements arose in twentieth-century Korea, both dedicated to the creation of a strong, modern, revived Korea, sufficiently transformed to use its national economic, military, and spiritual power to preserve its independence from both China

4. They happen to be the same: Idris.

5. For a review of conflict since 1945, see Patrick Brogan, *World Conflicts: A Comprehensive Guide to World Strife Since 1945* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Dan Smith for the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, *The State of War and Peace Atlas*, 3d ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997); and Field Marshal Lord Michael Carver, *War Since 1945*, rev. ed. (London: Ashfield Press, 1990). On the phenomenon of rebellion, see J. Bowyer Bell, *On Revolt: Strategies of National Liberation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

and Japan, yet still remain Korean at its cultural core. The concept of *juche*—self-reliance—knows no Demilitarized Zone. Both movements were revolutionary, not just in their dedication to driving away the Japanese imperialists, but in their vision of a new Korea. Like the *chang-sung* they needed each other and thus hated their reciprocated interdependence.

The bitter rivalry of the Christian-capitalist modernizers and Marxist-Leninists in Korea dates from the 1920s. Neither movement enjoyed any special advantages in leadership, organizational skill, moral legitimacy, economic leverage, or good luck. Both movements became targets of all forms of individual and collective repression by the Japanese. Both by 1945 had become expatriate movements, tainted to some degree by their associations abroad with the Chinese, Japanese radicals, the Russians, and the Americans, but equally dependent on foreign toleration or assistance for their survival. By Liberation Day (15 August 1945) the two Korean revolutionary movements stood poised to transfer their parallel struggle against Japan to a direct confrontation with each other, a conflict that would have occurred whether the United States and Soviet Union had divided Korea into occupation zones or not.

The Christian-capitalist modernizers had the advantage of pride of historical place in Korean reformism, opposition to Japanese colonialism, and political activism. The modernizers' first organizational effort coincided with the arrival of the first wave of Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries after 1885 and the end of repression against the embattled Catholic church, whose first permanent mission had come to Seoul in 1791.

Elements of the Court of King Kojong favored countering Japanese influence by allowing American, Canadian, British, and European missionaries and entrepreneurs more freedom. Education, medicine, and engineering were the most favored missionary projects. The Japanese won the political race, but not before the nationalist modernizers had gained footholds in the Pae Chae Boys School, Chosŏn Christian College, the Independence Club, Severance Hospital, and the Seoul Central YMCA, as well as the Protestant congregations and mission headquarters. Some modernizers never identified themselves as Christians for various philosophical and personal reasons. For example, the Christians discouraged anti-Japanese violence, which did not sit well with those ultra-nationalists who had survived the Righteous Armies War of 1907–9, a populist uprising against the Japanese that took eighteen thousand Korean lives. These secular ultra-nationalists, however, were willing to cooperate in a limited way with the Christians' passive resistance.

The key event for the Christian-modernizer movement occurred in the Samil (1 March 1919) Independence Movement, a popular anti-Japanese demonstration in Seoul occasioned by the death of former King

Kojong. A coalition of fifty nationalist leaders signed and published a Declaration of Independence near Independence Gate (*Tongnimun*), a monument to antiforeign resistance. All but one of the signatories was a practicing Christian or member of *Chondogyo* ("Heavenly Way"), a Korean religious movement that mixed Christianity with traditional Asian spiritual values. The Declaration brought a million Koreans into the streets of the major cities where the protest marchers chanted "*Daehan Tongrip Mansei*" or "Long Live Korean Independence" and waived the outlawed *taegukki* or Korean national flag. The Japanese colonial police and army crushed the movement, killing more than 1,000 Koreans at a cost of nine security forces lives. The Japanese arrested 19,500 Koreans, executed or jailed 3,000, and burned thousands of homes, schools, churches, and temples. Movement survivors and simply terrified members of the urban middle class fled to Manchuria, China, Russia, and the United States.

The collapse of the Samil Independence Movement encouraged the self-proclaimed "revolutionary option" of Marxist-Leninism to fill the nationalist vacuum. The first organized Korean Communists formed the People's Socialist Party in 1918 in Siberia, a Bolshevik effort to enlist the Korean expatriates in the war against the Russian "Whites" and Japanese Siberian expeditionary force. These Koreans provided the initial leadership of the Korean Communist Party and Korean Communist Youth Association, which set up organizing committees within Korea in 1925. For twenty years the Korean Communists surged and ebbed in power, mounting five different protest movements and enduring five periods of successful repression by the Japanese-Korean colonial police and military units. Communist-Christian conflict became a war within a war after the Communists, which now included Chinese-sponsored Koreans, subverted and betrayed *Shinganhoe*, a promising mass nationalist association led by Christians and secular nationalists, between 1927 and 1931. The Japanese drove various Communist guerrilla bands (part of larger Chinese Communist partisan divisions) from Korea and Manchuria into the Soviet Union in 1940-41. When the Asia-Pacific War of 1941-45 began, the Communists had no decisive advantage over the other expatriate Korean nationalists.

The Asia-Pacific war deepened and accelerated the prerevolutionary socio-economic upheaval of the Korean people and heartened the leaders of the two Korean revolutionary movements. The Japanese war effort drained Korea: tens of thousands of "comfort women," hundreds of thousands of industrial and military construction workers, tens of thousands of auxiliary Korean soldiers to guard prison camps or conduct counterpartisan operations, millions of tons of coal and minerals, and millions of tons of rice. Korean rice production doubled despite the loss of chemical

fertilizers and pesticides; Korean rice consumption dropped by half. Even though Korea escaped direct physical destruction, civic despair deepened and the public social and economic infrastructure deteriorated. Moreover, wartime mobilization forced Koreans—especially the Christian nationalists—into an ever more difficult position in their relations with the Japanese. The police power of the colonial government, ruthlessly applied, made survival and collaborationism virtually synonymous. “Pure” patriots existed only in hiding or exile. Of the postliberation competing leaders, the Christian-modernizers and ultra-nationalists (Kim Ku, Syngman Rhee, Yi Pom-sok, Kim Kyu-sik) remained in exile or remained out of public life (Cho Man-sik, Yo Un-hyong) in Korea. The Communists disappeared underground and became inactive (Pak Hon-yong, Ho Kia-I) or joined some part of the anti-Fascist war effort in China or Russia (Kim Tu-bong, Kim Mu-bong, Kim Chaek, Chae Yong-gun, Nam Il, Kim Il-sung). With weak organizations and overweening political ambition, both sets of revolutionaries waited for the Japanese Empire to commit *seppuku* with the assistance of the American armed forces.⁶

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The Korean War began in August 1945 in the classical pattern of what Mao Zedong and other Asian revolutionaries called a “people’s war of national liberation.” The conflict in Korea, however, was a people’s war with a difference because two revolutionary liberation movements followed parallel paths to power, but succeeded in dominating only half

6. Carter J. Eckert et al., *Korea: Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Il-chokak, 1990), 199–253; James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); Homer B. Hulbert, *The History of Korea*, 2 vols. (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House, 1905); Edward S. Mason et al., *The Economic and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Chong-sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction in Korea, 1896–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990); Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986); George L. Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832–1910* (Pyongyang: Union College Press, 1929); Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, vol. 1, *The Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Suh Dae-sook, *The Korean Communist Movement, 1918–1949* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); and Suh Dae-sook, *Kim Il-sung* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

For personal stories, see J. Earnest Fisher, *Pioneers of Modern Korea* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1977), and Richard Saccone, *Koreans to Remember* (Seoul: Hollmy, 1993). For the American-Korean connection, see Tae-Hwan Kwak et al., eds., *U.S.-Korean Relations, 1882–1982* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1982).

the country. The division was asymmetrical in almost every way. The Republic of Korea got a population twice the size of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the best arable river valleys, but North Korea got all the hydro-electric power and coal and mineral resources, as well as the Japanese-built industrial base sited near the energy sources. Both sides attempted to establish a single national government for Korea through all measures short of full-scale war: economic intimidation, the creating of "fronts" and coalitions, denouncing the American and Russian occupation governments, bribery and corruption-patronage, political assassinations and betrayals, street demonstrations and strikes, urban terrorism directed at police and civic leaders, purges and pogroms, and the manipulation of occupation officials. Although the Communists (with Soviet assistance) crushed all non-Communist opposition north of the 38th Parallel by 1950, the nationalist-modernizers had far more difficulty eliminating the challenge of the South Korean Labor Party, in part because of American ambivalence about the goals and methods of the modernizers, eventually dominated by Syngman Rhee. A partisan war that began in March 1948 could not stop the creation of the Republic of Korea, but it could create a situation that matched the second phase of a People's War, the use of unconventional warfare to erode a central government's ability to defend itself.⁷

The role of the American and Russian occupation governments was that of willing patron to the most acceptable revolutionaries—from their perspective. The Russians in Pyongyang (political officers all) seem to have embraced Kim Il-sung with little hesitation, although they forced him to tolerate other Communist challengers, if not indefinitely. They had no need to fuel his ambition to rule all Korea. The American patronage pattern is more complex and ambiguous. The initial occupation regime—U.S. Army Forces in Korea and U.S. Army Government in Korea—in southern Korea had one over-riding mission: to disarm and repatriate all the Japanese to the Home Islands. Thereafter, USAMGIK and all its Korean employees and advisers struggled to keep the peace while someone, somewhere figured out how to create a legitimate

7. Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); Jounghwon A. Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945–1972* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); Christopher Thorne, *The Far Eastern War: States and Societies, 1941–45* (London: Unwin, 1985); Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, vol. 1, Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Nam Koon-woo, *The North Korean Communist Leadership, 1945–1965* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974); Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942–1960* (Seoul: Panmun, 1978); and James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941–1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

national government for all of Korea. It was an impossible task at which Korean political leaders, an American-Soviet trusteeship commission, and a United Nations Commission all failed.

The American military officers wanted USAFIK (mostly the U.S. XXIV Corps of three divisions) to be relieved of its peacekeeping duties and its units redeployed or demobilized. The U.S. Army accepted a continuing responsibility for advising and training a Korean Constabulary (Army after December 1948), and it accepted Syngman Rhee as the least objectionable Korean leader. The State Department wanted American troops to remain in Korea, but could not counter the Army's budgetary and strategic arguments for withdrawal, even after the outbreak of guerrilla warfare and border clashes between regular Korean forces in 1948–49. The diplomats wanted American engagement in Korea—largely for the leverage that engagement provided American influence in Japan—but they did not regard Syngman Rhee with much enthusiasm. The North Korean invasion of June 1950 did not solve this problem.⁸

8. John Merrill, *Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989); Chi-Young Pak, *Political Opposition in Korea, 1945–1960* (Seoul: Seoul National University, 1980); Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947–1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Scholarly accounts of the Korean conflict and the roots of the Cold War in Asia include Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War* (London: Longman, 1986); Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York and Tokyo: Columbia University Press and University of Tokyo Press, 1977); Bruce Cumings, ed., *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943–1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); William W. Steuck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Huh Nam-sung, "The Quest for a Bulwark of Anti-Communism: The Formation of the Korean Army Officer Corps and its Political Socialization, 1945–1950" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1987); Lee Young-woo, "The United States and the Formation of the Republic of Korea Army, 1945–1950" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1984). My own documentary research, however, in the records of the Korean Military Advisory Group and the records of the 971st CIC Detachment (Korea) is the basis of my understanding of the partisan war, 1948–50; these records are in USAFIK Historical Files, RG 332, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. My own assessment appears in "Captain James H. Hausman and the Formation of the Korean Army, 1945–1950," *Armed Forces and Society* 23 (Summer 1997): 503–39, and "The Forgotten Army in the Misunderstood War: The *Hanguk Gun* in the Korean War, 1946–1953," in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, eds., *The Korean War, 1950–1953: A Fifty Year Retrospective* (Canberra, Australia: The Chief of Army's Military History Conference, 2000), 1–26. My assessment is based on extensive interviews with Lt. Col. Hausman, former officers of K MAG and their contemporary diaries and letters, and retired general officers of the Korean army. See also the dissertations by To-Woong Chung, "The Role of the U.S. Occupation in the Creation of the South Korean Armed Forces, 1945–1950" (Kansas State University, 1985), and Kim Kook-hun, "The North Korean People's Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1945–1950" (University of London, 1989).

Convinced that South Korea had reached an economic and spiritual breaking point and had been abandoned by the United States, Kim Il-sung persuaded Stalin and Mao Zedong (with the aid of his Soviet advisers) to back an escalation to conventional war in June 1950, the third phase of People's War. The co-conspirators agreed that the South Korean army and government ("puppets") would collapse and that American military intervention—if any—would be ineffective and tardy. This reasonable but completely wrong calculation would cost millions of people—mostly Koreans—their lives.

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The Korean War that everyone knows (1950–53) is the third phase of the Korean People's War, the war that began with an invasion across an international border (as established by the United Nations) and ended with an Armistice Agreement (still in force) in July 1953. Of course, a more accurate description is that the People's War reverted to Phase II: political and military coercion. This war is best understood as a set of interacting diadic relationships. The first diad—and most obvious—is determined by war aims: (1) victory in terms of a unified Korea as pursued by both the Koreans, the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Nations; and (2) some sort of negotiated *temporary* status quo ante bellum, acceptable to all the belligerents but only to the two Koreans after their great power patrons assured them of continued military protection and economic assistance. The second diad is strategic-operational and also obvious: (1) the war of maneuver, June 1950–October 1951 in which both coalition armies conducted major offensives; and (2) the "stalemate," "trench warfare" period in which military operations had limited goals tied to the course of the armistice negotiations. Americans might call this the "Pork Chop Hill war," although the Chinese have greater reason to memorialize the Battle of Shangangling and the South Koreans the Battle of Paekmasan (White Horse Mountain). These first two diadic relationships, however, reflect several less appreciated causal diads that define the Korean War in truly Asian ways. What one thinks one sees is not necessarily the essential truth.

The conduct and consequences of the Korean War should be understood in terms of at least six diadic conflicts. One is the tension between Far East Command (Tokyo) and the American civil-military leadership coalition in Washington. This conflict is not just the Truman-MacArthur controversy, but includes two wartime presidents, a group of State Department officials and two Secretaries of State, two Secretaries of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and three theater commanders. At issue was the current and future role of the United States in Asia and the meaning of forward, collective defense and nuclear deterrence. This

diadic relationship, however, was also affected by conflict between three 8th Army commanders and three theater commanders over strategy and the relative balance between air and ground operations. Interservice relations were not a critical problem, nor were there serious difficulties with the United Nations military contingents. It is far more important to focus on the American–South Korean political and military collaboration and conflict since Syngman Rhee proved to be a determined national leader and very difficult ally.

The Korean War is not just an American war or a proxy Cold War conflict, but an Asian war. In November, 1951 the war became another Korean effort to defend itself from a Chinese invasion, a change that allowed a real national mobilization and strengthened the Rhee regime and made Japanese participation more acceptable. The Chinese–Soviet alliance created another important diadic relationship—also characterized by conflict—that shaped the war. After Stalin's death in March 1953, the Soviet leadership was ready to abandon the war, but Mao Zedong was not, largely because he believed the U.S.–ROK alliance was about to collapse. The Chinese also knew that both Korean regimes had internal conflicts, so Mao's concern was to support Kim Il-sung while the Communists waited for the Rhee regime to commit political suicide as it almost did in a constitutional crisis in 1952 and in the dispute with the United States over POW repatriation in 1953. It is also worth remembering that the two Koreas conducted a partisan war against each other that continued after June 1950. United Nations partisan forces conducted raids into North Korea throughout the war while Communist guerrillas remained a serious problem in 1950–52 and a considerable nuisance in 1953 and afterwards.

The Chinese strategic dilemma illustrates the complex interaction of a People's War turned international. In January 1950 Mao Zedong finally pried a mutual security agreement from the Soviet Union that was aimed at Japan and the United States. Subsequent negotiations over 1950–51 produced three areas of military aid Mao and his generals desperately wanted, not just to defend the People's Republic but to conduct operations in Tibet, Formosa, and Korea. These requirements were a modern Chinese air force, the ordnance modernization and standardization of the People's Liberation Army, and the creation of an independent military-industrial infrastructure. Chinese intervention in Korea justified these programs and—perhaps—might drive down the Russian charges for military assistance, which was not free. The Chinese, however, had to keep fighting (and dying) to keep Stalin's military aid coming. The Russians refused to commit their air defense forces (air and ground) to anything but the defense of Manchuria, which meant a severe drain on Chinese and North Korean manpower and munitions to keep any sort of logistical system functioning within Korea to support a coalition ground

army of 1.5 million after 1951. Although Communist artillery became a serious problem in 1952–53 for the United Nations troops, Chinese–North Korean shell expenditures still fell below those of United Nations Command by a factor of three or four. Although Chinese military effectiveness remained good through the end of the war, the People's Liberation Army that won the Chinese civil war was close to destruction by July 1953. The major Chinese offensives of autumn 1952 and spring–summer 1953 cannot be explained only by some negotiating strategy for Panmunjom.

The Chinese-Russian "Great Game" over military assistance gave Kim Il-sung an unparalleled opportunity to push aside and eventually purge Korean Communists who represented Chinese and Russian interests. Kim Il-sung (like Syngman Rhee) emerged from the Armistice far more powerful than he had been in June 1950 when such potential rivals as Kim Tu-bong, Pak Hon-yong, and Ho Kai-i might still have forced some form of collective leadership upon Kim. By 1954 all three of these men were dead or disgraced. Senior North Korean army officers with Chinese and Russian military ties did not escape eventual purging but they managed to escape North Korea with their lives. A fast learner, Kim Il-sung perpetuated Stalinism more than forty years after his role model's death.⁹

9. The best of the published works are William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: Korea, America in Korea, 1950–1953* (New York: Times Books, 1987); Callum MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1986); and Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *The British Part in the Korean War*, 2 vols., (London: HMSO, 1990 and 1995). The best perspectives on the U.S. experience of the war are Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992); Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Test of War, 1950–1953* (Washington: Historical Office, OSD, 1988); James F. Schnable, *U.S. Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1972), and Burton I. Kaufman, *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1986); MIS/Gs, GHQ, UNC, "One Year in Korea, A Summary, 15 June 1950–25 June 1951," 1951, copy in the General James A. Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, Virginia, a significant new source of Korean War documentation in the United States, and Hdqs. Eighth United States Army, transcript, "Year-End Tactical Briefing," Correspondents Billets, Seoul, Korea, 24 December 1952; Hdqs. UNC (OAC/S G-5 Civil Affairs), transcript, "Briefing Conference on Republic of Korea for Unified Command Mission to the ROK," Tokyo, 9–12 April 1952, Gen. Thomas Herren Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; Military History Department, Korean Institute of Military History, *The Korean War*, 3 vols. (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 1999–2001).

For the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China, see, for example, Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); Shu-Guang Zhang,

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The Korean War requires "new thinking" that deals with the conflict as a war of postcolonial succession, a People's War of revolutionary national liberation, and a war of regional and global great power intervention. It is certainly not the only war of such complexity. In addition to the contemporaneous wars in Asia, the wars of the last seventy years in Spain, Algeria, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, the Congo, and Afghanistan show similar characteristics.

If the postcolonial wars of liberation and political succession are viewed only as proxy wars caused and shaped by the great power rivalries of the Cold War, they will have little lasting meaning except as historical curiosities. If these wars were only the spawn of a global struggle of two competitive social and economic systems, they presumably would disappear as that rivalry waned. Such is not the case. The Korean War remains not only a contemporary security issue since it created the two Koreas, but stands as a cautionary tale for explaining wars already in progress and wars yet to come.

Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992) and *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, eds., *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1989); Mark A. Ryan, *Chinese Attitudes Toward Nuclear Weapons: China and the United States During the Korean War* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1989); Robert Simmons, *The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow, and the Politics of the Korean Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1975); Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Eugeny P. Bajanov and Natalia Bajanova, "The Korean Conflict, 1950-1953," MS history, Institute for Contemporary International Problems, Russian Foreign Ministry, 1997 (?). The author has been privileged to join Professor Yu Bin and Li Xiobing in editing an anthology of memoirs and reports by the senior commanders of the Chinese People's Volunteers Force, *Mao's Generals Remember Korea* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001). Essential to discussion of the Communist side of the war are the materials published by the Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., especially *The Cold War in Asia 6-7* (Winter 1995-96). For an important collection of participant testimony on Chinese and Soviet participation in the war, see Kim Chull-baum, ed., *The Truth about the Korean War* (Seoul: Eulyoo Publishing 1991). Dr. Kim was a pioneer in Korean war studies and president of the Korean War Studies Association, Seoul, Korea, until his untimely death in 1995.

For a literature review, see Allan R. Millett, "The Korean War: A 50-Year Critical Historiography," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24 (March 2001): 188-224. See also Yasuda Jun, "A Survey: China and the Korean War," *Social Science Japan Journal* 1 (1998): 71-83.

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