



The US, the UN and the Korean War

Communism in the Far East
and the American Struggle for
Hegemony in the Cold War

ROBERT BARNES



BLOOMSBURY

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For my Mum and Dad.

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Struggle for Hegemony in the Cold War

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMC	Additional Measures Committee
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty
CAB	Cabinet Office
CM	Cabinet Meetings
CP	Cabinet Papers
CPVA	Chinese People's Volunteer Army
DDE	Dwight D. Eisenhower Library
DEFE	Defence Ministry
DO	Dominions Office
DPRK	Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EDC	European Defence Community
FO	Foreign Office
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GOC	Good Offices Committee
HST	Harry S. Truman Library
ICF	Indian Custodial Force
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAC	Military Armistice Commission

MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society
MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army
MSC	Military Staff Committee
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NAI	National Archives of India
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration (United States)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NKPA	North Korean People's Army
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NNRC	Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission
NNSC	Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission
NSC	National Security Council
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PREM	Prime Minister's Office
PRC	People's Republic of China
PUL	Princeton University Library
RLS	Royal Library of Sweden
ROK	Republic of Korea
ROKA	Republic of Korea Army
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander in Europe
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
UKNA	United Kingdom National Archives
UN	United Nations
UNARMS	United Nations Archives and Records Management Section
UNC	United Nations Command
UNCOK	United Nations Commission on Korea
UNCURK	United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly (Official Records)
UNKRA	United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency

UNSC	United Nations Security Council (Official Records)
UNTCOK	United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea
US	United States'
USAMGIK	United States Army Military Government in Korea
UVL	University of Vermont Library
WEU	Western European Union
YUL	Yale University Library Manuscripts Collections

INTRODUCTION

To describe the Korean War as 'forgotten' or 'unknown' is now an unwarranted cliché. The significance of this short but intense conflagration in shaping the post-war world, not to mention the risks of a global conflict that it entailed, especially in the winter of 1950–51, have long been appreciated by political, international, military, social and economic historians alike. While the Cold War clearly existed prior to 1950, the Korean War set in motion a chain of events that shaped international relations until 1989 and beyond. As a result, over the previous three decades a proliferation of research has been conducted into a wide array of aspects of this complex confrontation. Yet one crucial aspect has been almost entirely overlooked and will be addressed in this book.

Throughout the Korean War relations between the United States and members of the Commonwealth of Nations¹ at the United Nations (UN) oscillated between long periods of amicability and a series of tense crises. Publicly, few questions were ever raised against US policy. But behind-the-scenes the Commonwealth occasionally challenged US dominance of the UN. This book will highlight and explain the level of disharmony that existed between these states as they struggled to formulate an acceptable UN response to the Korean War. In doing so, it will demonstrate that the Commonwealth was able, at least to some degree, to constrain the policy of the US government at the UN when its members acted in unison. But this

raises the further questions: when and why did the Commonwealth unite? I demonstrate that such unity only occurred when the risk of a global conflict was at its greatest, when key Commonwealth personalities were prepared to exercise their influence, when coincidence brought the Commonwealth members together, and when the US government was willing to bow to Commonwealth pressure. Conversely, when these conditions were removed the Commonwealth became disjointed and its members put their other allegiances ahead of Commonwealth loyalty. In these circumstances, no single Commonwealth country, not even Britain, had sufficient influence to alter US policy.

Washington found it very difficult to ignore a united Commonwealth because its members represented key allies in vital Cold War theatres. Given the closeness of their wartime alliance and Britain's continued, if diminishing, worldwide influence, London was the US's closest ally. This was especially the case in Western Europe where the British were expected to play a leading role in strengthening the political, economic and military situation in the face of a direct Soviet threat. Canada, as its northern neighbour and long-standing economic and security partner, was also a close ally. US relations with Australia and New Zealand were more recent but had been bound in blood during the Second World War and Washington had come to see these two countries as its most dependable friends in the Pacific. South Africa, as with most of that continent, featured less in American thoughts but its staunchly anti-communist position was appreciated and friendly relations existed. Of more difficulty was the role of India and Pakistan in US planning. Although the US government was extremely wary of India's position of neutrality both countries were considered of great strategic importance in the Cold War. Furthermore, Washington appreciated the influence India had over the emerging Third World. Efforts were made, therefore, to win these countries over to the Western camp.

The Commonwealth's importance was most clearly evident in the UN where it represented a numerically significant voting bloc and wielded much moral authority because of its multiethnic nature, its liberal democratic traditions, and its close ties to various groups of

other members. The 'Old' Commonwealth countries—Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa—were an integral part of the Western bloc. But the 'New' Commonwealth members—India and Pakistan—were part of the loosely connected 'neutral' bloc. India, in particular, had assumed the extremely difficult task of mediating between the two superpowers at the UN. Despite these differing perspectives, common ground was occasionally found between the Commonwealth members and they were able to act as a pseudo-bloc to achieve their temporary shared goals.

The UN, moreover, provided a location in which Commonwealth representatives could meet regularly to coordinate policy. Such contact was more problematic through normal diplomatic channels given the vast distances between member states. So while the United States was the hegemonic power at the UN in the early 1950s, it still relied on the votes of its allies to exercise its will and so had to pay attention to Commonwealth concerns when raised.

The following pages are structured to emphasize and clarify these points. The Prologue will provide extensive background detail on the international and peninsular origins of the conflict and the nature of relations between the United States and the Commonwealth at the UN leading up to the eruption of fighting. The necessary contextual information to make sense of subsequent decisions will thus be established. Each of the seven main chapters will then examine relations between the United States and the Commonwealth members at the UN during a specific phase of the conflict. The goal of each chapter is to establish whether the Commonwealth members were able to unite and constrain US policy and what factors led to this outcome. Because decisions regarding UN policy were not taken in a vacuum but were heavily dependent on the military situation in Korea, domestic developments in the United States and each of the Commonwealth countries, and international events connected to the Cold War, each chapter begins by setting the context.

The opening two chapters cover the tense and fluid early months of the Korean conflict between June 1950 and February 1951. Chapter 1 examines the UN Security Council's establishment of its

first collective security action and the General Assembly's endorsement of the unification of Korea by force. Throughout this period US dominance of the UN remained largely unchallenged by a Commonwealth that was disunited. Only India voiced any significant criticism but could not rally its Commonwealth partners behind its position. In contrast, during the winter crisis following Chinese intervention outlined in Chapter 2 the Commonwealth did unite for a sustained period and acted as a constraining agent upon Washington. President Harry S. Truman and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson were determined to have Beijing branded an aggressor, but the Commonwealth members feared such action would lead to an escalation of the conflict. In consequence, they acted together to force the Americans to accept a number of UN attempts to bring about a ceasefire. Only after considerable delay and after Washington had granted many concessions did the Commonwealth agree to OK calls to have the People's Republic of China (PRC) punished.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover the often overlooked middle 18 months of the Korean War. The first of these chapters focuses on the UN's continuing unsuccessful attempts to bring the fighting to an end while at the same time considering what sanctions to impose upon China. During this time the Commonwealth unity that had existed during the winter crisis slowly disintegrated as the military situation improved and Washington adopted a more moderate course. Still, much friction existed, especially between the Americans and the British, over the timing and nature of sanctions. Chapter 4 then reveals that the Commonwealth became almost entirely subservient to the Americans during the first year of the armistice talks that commenced in July 1951. With representatives from the UN and Communist commands meeting directly and making slow but steady progress, all the Commonwealth members were content to postpone consideration of the Korean question at the UN hopeful that a ceasefire was forthcoming.

The next two chapters then cover the final tumultuous year of the Korean War. Chapter 5 examines the second half of 1952 when the UN resumed its efforts to bring about a ceasefire after the breakdown of the armistice negotiations. At the root of these problems was the

fate of prisoners of war. In contrast to the US government, the Commonwealth members were not prepared to allow this one outstanding issue to prolong or lead to the escalation of the conflict. During weeks of deliberations the Commonwealth members, emboldened by the unprecedented weakness of the Truman administration, worked closely to find a compromise resolution sponsored by India in the face of US opposition. Yet, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, this challenge to US hegemony did no lasting damage to relations between Washington and the Commonwealth capitals. In the final months before the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement the Commonwealth members were generally supportive of the new US President Dwight D. Eisenhower's decision to avoid further debate at the UN. They accepted that the best way to bring about a ceasefire was through direct negotiations with the terms of the Indian Resolution providing acceptable parameters.

The final chapter of this book examines the UN's efforts to establish a political conference to bring about a peaceful settlement of the unification question. This issue caused much antagonism between the United States and the Commonwealth members, as the latter firmly believed that neutral countries, especially India, should be represented. The Eisenhower administration, however, insisted that only belligerents should participate. But this time Commonwealth unity buckled under pressure and Washington had its way. Yet the Communist countries opposed the composition proposed by the UN and it took bilateral discussions beyond the UN to finally agree to the Geneva Conference. And even then, no means to unify Korea could be agreed and the talks were prematurely terminated. The Epilogue then briefly examines the subsequent fates of the Korean question at the UN, of the nature of the Commonwealth and of the Commonwealth's relationship with the United States. As such, it demonstrates that with the Korean ceasefire holding, other crises emerging and decolonization accelerating, the Commonwealth was no longer able or willing to unite to constrain US policy at the UN.

From what I have outlined above this topic evidently falls within the broad sphere of international history since it examines the

diplomatic interaction of a number of states within the context of two very different international organizations. Furthermore, this book is concerned principally with the top echelons of foreign decision-making within the US and Commonwealth governments. Throughout, it emphasizes that issues of power, national interest and security governed the actions taken by the United States and the Commonwealth members at the UN during the Korean War. Yet this is not to say that other factors were unimportant. Clearly, the key individuals involved had very different conceptualizations of how best to achieve these goals. As will be discussed in more detail below, the Commonwealth members shared a set of liberal democratic values that formed the bedrock of the organization. But this vague ideological notion did not provide a blueprint for meeting the multifarious Cold War problems faced by each of the Commonwealth governments. In consequence, the vast majority of Commonwealth leaders, even those from nominally socialist political parties such as British Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee and his Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, saw their national interests as being best served by siding with the United States in its hostile campaign against the Soviet Union. Only Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru adopted a contrary course, championing the policy of non-alignment.

At the same time, racial prejudices caused the greatest ruptures within the Commonwealth even though it was precisely the multiethnic composition and liberal traditions of the organization that gave it such great moral authority at the UN. The staunchly conservative governments of Winston Churchill in Britain, Robert Menzies in Australia and Sidney Holland in New Zealand, as well as that of Dr Daniel Malan, the architect of apartheid, in South Africa, viewed the New Commonwealth countries as racially inferior and found it very difficult to work with them as equals. For their part, Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart Liaquat Ali-Khan, despite their continued admiration for many British and European practices, still harboured much resentment towards their 'white' former colonial masters. Even so, the factors that did unite the Commonwealth in its effort to constrain US policy at the UN tended to be a product less of these 'soft' issues and more to do with very real 'hard' issues of power.

Moreover, in the tradition of international history, the research conducted for this book has focused on a number of national archives in the United States and Commonwealth countries. It also looks beyond these formal records at a variety of private papers in an attempt to discover the motivations behind the views and actions of a number of the key decision-makers. In addition, this book draws from the abundant secondary literature written on the Korean War. Specifically, three categories of historical study are closely related to its subject matter: international histories of the Korean War; national histories of the role played by the United States and individual Commonwealth countries in the conflict; and histories of the two international organizations under consideration, the Commonwealth and the UN. This book shares many significant similarities with each of these groups of work. But, as will be demonstrated, crucial differences exist.

William Stueck is the only true international historian of the Korean War. In his two more recent major books, *The Korean War* and *Rethinking the Korean War*, as well as in a number of articles, Stueck has provided by far the most extensive examination of the conflict's impact on global politics. He also provides the most considered analysis of activities at the UN and the influence wielded by some of the Commonwealth members within this forum and in Washington.² Even so, he is principally concerned with the roles played by the three largest powers involved in Korea—the United States, the Soviet Union and China—and he does not consider the impact of the Commonwealth as a united bloc. Moreover, while he does note occasional tension between the United States, Britain, Canada and India, he largely sees the Commonwealth members as playing a part in support of US policy at the UN. He does not think the Commonwealth members had the ability or will to significantly constrain US policy because of their small military contribution and desire to maintain close relations with Washington.³ In contrast, this book argues that Washington was much more susceptible to Commonwealth pressure when its members were united.

Compared to the limited number of international histories of the Korean War, numerous national histories have been written focusing

on the role played by an individual state. While American-centric accounts dominate, Rosemary Foot has provided the most complete national history of the US experience in Korea in *The Wrong War, A Substitute for Victory* and numerous articles. Foot provides a similar argument to my own in that she states that Washington's allies, particularly Britain, did have a moderating influence on US policy at the UN. But the similarities end there since Foot fails to identify the Commonwealth as an agent of constraint. She also understates the level of allied influence on US decision-making, claiming it did little but reinforce cautious views that already existed. Foot, moreover, spends relatively little time considering the UN context, concentrating almost exclusively on activities in Washington.⁴

With regards to Commonwealth countries, the role of Britain has received by far the most attention. Anthony Farrar-Hockley's two-volume work *The British Part in the Korean War*⁵ and Callum MacDonald's *Britain and the Korean War*⁶ are the most complete examples. Peter L(owe)⁷ and Michael Dockrill⁸ have also written a number of important works on the British experience. Two excellent national histories of Canada's role during the conflict have also been written: Denis Stairs' *The Diplomacy of Constraint*⁹ and John Melady's *Korea: Canada's Forgotten War*.¹⁰ Easily the most far-reaching study of Australia's role is Robert O'Neill's two-volume book, *Australia in the Korean War, 1950–53*,¹¹ but Gavan McCormack's *Cold War, Hot War* provides another valuable contribution.¹² The only national history of New Zealand's role is Ian McGibbon's detailed two-volume study *New Zealand and the Korean War*.¹³ And the best account of India's experience during the Korean War remains Shiv Dayal's somewhat dated book, *India's Role in the Korean Question*.¹⁴

This book is inherently linked to these national histories in the sense that it too examines the decision-making processes in each of these Commonwealth countries. Yet the following pages are different in two crucial ways. First, none of these works has examined in any detail how the Commonwealth members interacted with each other and under what circumstances they were brought together. Second, none of these texts truly considers why the UN proved such a fruitful forum for the Commonwealth to act in unison and

constrain US policy. The UN dimension receives relatively little attention throughout, as each historian prefers to focus on bilateral relations. It is this book's contention that due to its size, multiethnic composition and shared values, the Commonwealth wielded much influence in the UN and could not be ignored by the dominant power, the United States.

The final cluster of works connected to this book is that dedicated to the two international organizations in question, the Commonwealth and the UN. In terms of the former, a number of studies have examined its general workings and evolution. The best examples of these are H. Duncan Hall's *Commonwealth*¹⁵ and Patrick Gordon Walker's *The Commonwealth*.¹⁶ Other studies have considered relations between the Commonwealth members and the United States during the Cold War, including Ritchie Ovendale's *The English-Speaking Alliance*¹⁷ and A.P. Thornton's article "The transformation of the Commonwealth and the "special relationship"". ¹⁸ These works do place the Commonwealth at the forefront of attention, stressing the importance of the organization in the post-war world. But none of them concentrate specifically on either the Korean War or the role of the Commonwealth at the UN. Ovendale's work also only examines the perspectives of the 'white' former British Dominions. The only partial exception is Graeme Mount's study of the Korean War, *The Diplomacy of War*.¹⁹ Still, Mount's narrative is weighted too heavily in favour of his native Canada and he dedicates very little space to the complex interaction between the Commonwealth members in formulating UN policy. And, like Ovendale, he focuses only on certain Commonwealth countries, completely ignoring even India's crucial role.

On the UN, the most thorough works are Evan Luard's *A History of the United Nations*,²⁰ Paul Kennedy's *Parliament of Man*²¹ and Bertrand Maurice's *The United Nations: Past, Present and Future*.²² These studies cover lengthy periods and a whole range of problems that came before the world organization. Despite briefly examining the role of the UN during the Korean War, none of these historians provides in-depth analysis and they focus too heavily on American activities. No consideration whatsoever is given to the influence of

the Commonwealth. To be sure, Tae-Ho Yoo's *The Korean War and the United Nations*²³ is dedicated solely to the role of the UN in the conflict. But he is much more concerned with the legal nature of the collective security action than the diplomatic activity that went on behind the scenes. He thus pays scant attention to the activities of the Commonwealth members. Likewise, Leland Goodrich's *Korea: A Study of US Policy in the United Nations*,²⁴ as the title suggests, concentrates solely on the US experience and does not recognize the unique role played by the Commonwealth.

This book thus makes an innovative and essential contribution to historical knowledge. It not only provides a new and unique perspective on the Korean War; it also examines two other issues that have come under far less scrutiny by historians of the Cold War: the roles of the Commonwealth and the UN. As it demonstrates, behind-the-scenes alliance diplomacy played a crucial part in shaping the course of the Korean War. While the United States sought to use its dominance of the UN to legitimize its policies, this process was far more complicated than usually assumed and Washington often had to make concessions to its Commonwealth allies. Most significantly, the Commonwealth, when united, was able to constrain US policy, to some degree at least, at the UN. Even in the deeply polarized world at the height of the Cold War the Commonwealth mattered to its members, at the UN and beyond, and was more than just a symbolic group of states bound by a common history.

PROLOGUE

Before first light on 25 June 1950 ferocious fighting erupted in Korea at various points along the 38th parallel. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA)—supported by Soviet-made tanks, artillery and aircraft—pushed south across the de facto border quickly gaining ground from the ill-prepared Republic of Korea Army (ROKA). Very few precise details exist regarding what actually took place during these initial exchanges but it soon became apparent that this was more than another minor skirmish. While there had been concerns in New York, Washington and the Commonwealth capitals that such an eventuality might take place, few had predicted the timing and scale of the North Korean invasion. By the time the UN Security Council convened in an emergency session later that day—the point where this book commences its narrative—North Korean forces were bearing down on Seoul.

These events marked the beginning of the Korean War but this conflict had been a long time in the making.¹ To understand the outbreak and course of this civil and international conflagration it is first necessary to outline briefly the recent history of Korea. After losing its independence to Japan in 1910, Korea experienced 35 years as a colony in which the indigenous population was, in general, treated brutally. Numerous resistance movements sprang up but were violently suppressed and forced into exile in neighbouring China, the Soviet Union and beyond. Korea received very little international

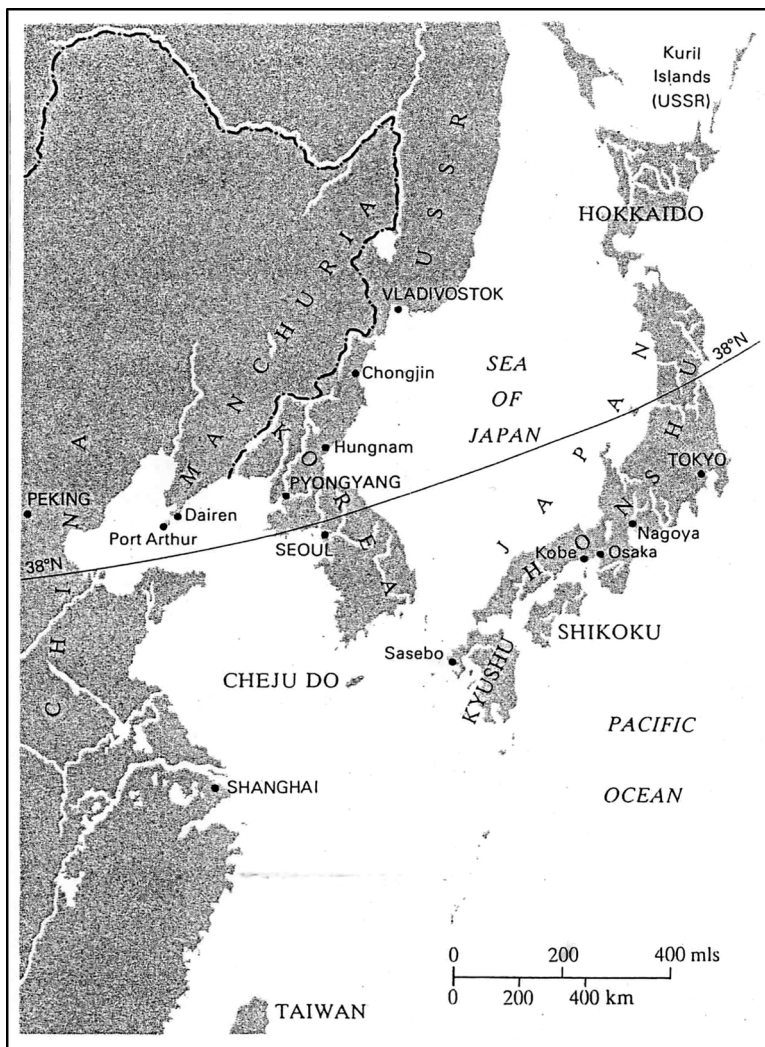


Figure 1 Korea and neighbouring areas.

Source: Lowe, Peter, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 266.

attention until the 1943 Cairo Conference where the United States, Britain and China agreed that after the defeat of Japan, Korea should regain its independence 'in due course'. Then, in the dying days of the

Second World War, the US government, fearing that the Soviet Red Army would occupy Korea after Moscow had declared war upon Japan, proposed dividing the peninsula at the 38th parallel. Soviet forces would be stationed in the north and US forces in the south. Somewhat surprisingly the Soviet Union accepted this plan even though it left two-thirds of the Korean population and the capital city, Seoul, in the US occupation zone while US forces were unlikely to arrive for a number of weeks.²

The two occupations had very contrasting experiences. In the south, the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) abolished the Korean 'people's committees' formed after the Japanese surrender fearing they had communist sympathies. Instead, the Americans retained Japanese and Korean collaborators in official posts creating friction with the local population. With little direction or funding from Washington as the Truman administration focused on the recovery of Western Europe and Japan, USAMGIK worked closely with the unpopular local elite, especially Syngman Rhee, a right-wing nationalist who had campaigned for decades in exile in the United States against Japanese rule. In the north, the Soviet Civil Authority worked closely with the people's committees instigating a programme of land collectivization and nationalization, forcing wealthy landowners and industrialists to flee south. Kim Il-sung, a former anti-Japanese guerrilla fighter and officer in the Soviet Red Army, was hand-picked by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin to be Chairman of the Provisional People's Committee for North Korea but quickly proved to be a popular choice with the peasantry due to his energetic leadership.³

Meanwhile, the work of the US-Soviet Joint Commission, established at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in December 1945 to bring about Korea's independence, became stalemated. The US government, eager to terminate its costly military occupation, consequently brought the problem of Korean independence to the UN General Assembly hoping to use its dominance of the world organization to find an acceptable solution. This ploy initially proved effective since on 14 November 1947 Resolution 112 (II) was adopted stating that the UN's objectives were to establish a 'united,

independent and democratic' Korea and establishing the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to oversee the creation of a proportionate National Assembly. The Soviet Civil Authority, however, refused to recognize UNTCOK or hold elections in the north.

Nonetheless, elections were held in South Korea on 10 May 1948. With left-wing parties boycotting and corruption much in evidence, Rhee gained victory and on 15 August 1948 the Republic of Korea (ROK) was declared, USAMGIK was terminated, and US forces began to withdraw. In retaliation, less than a month later the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established in North Korea with Kim appointed Premier. On 12 December 1948 the General Assembly then adopted Resolution 195 (III) endorsing the elections in the south and the sovereignty of the ROK, and establishing the UN Commission on Korea (UNCOK) to use its good offices to bring about the unification of Korea. But the work of UNCOK proved futile since both Rhee and Kim claimed authority over the entire peninsula. They also threatened to use force to unify the country, while a number of bloody clashes took place along the 38th parallel. UNCOK thus devoted much of its energy to observing the developing military stand-off.⁴

At the same time, Cold War tensions reached a new high. Nineteen forty-nine witnessed the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the successful testing of the first Soviet atomic bomb and the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War leading to the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October. The last of these events had the most profound impact on Korea. The Truman administration, facing an enormous domestic backlash for the 'loss' of China, adopted an ambiguous policy. It continued to recognize Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist rump regime on Taiwan and opposed the seating of the PRC at the UN but it did not offer military protection to Taiwan. In stark contrast, Moscow recognized the PRC and walked out of the UN Security Council when that body failed to do so in January 1950. Yet Stalin was worried that China, and Chairman Mao Zedong in particular, could threaten Soviet interests in East Asia and his own pre-eminence in the Communist world. In February 1950, therefore, Stalin, with only a

little reluctance, signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance.⁵

The Communist victory in China also influenced other events in Asia. Close ties were forged between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist parties and the Chinese Military Advisory Group was sent to Indochina to provide advice and financial and military assistance to the Viet Minh, the independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh. As a result, the United States directly provided financial and military assistance to the French in Indochina for the first time.⁶ More limited assistance was also given to the ethnic-Chinese dominated Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) in its efforts to oust the British. In reaction to these worrying developments the new British Director of Operations in Malaya, Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs, improved the coordination of the counterinsurgency and established 500 'New Villages'—guarded communities to replace illegal Chinese squatter camps on the edges of the jungle. The Briggs Plan intended to deprive the MNLA of recruits, food and supplies thus forcing the guerrillas into open combat.⁷

In this dangerous climate Kim asked Stalin to authorize and provide support for a military invasion of South Korea, assuring him that this would inspire the people to rise up against Rhee. The Soviet leader had previously rejected similar requests on the grounds that such action might lead to war with the United States. But this time he assented. The Soviet leader felt emboldened by recent Cold War developments and dared to make this move after Acheson, speaking at the National Press Club on 12 January 1950, had excluded Korea from the US defence perimeter in the Pacific. Furthermore, Stalin was eager to trigger a conflict in Korea that might embroil China in a drawn out conflict with the United States, distracting Washington away from Europe while making the PRC more dependent on Moscow. Stalin did give Mao the final go-ahead on the invasion but the Chinese leader had little choice but to accept this fait accompli even though it disrupted his plans for conquering Taiwan. The Soviet Union thus provided Kim with material assistance and advisers to plan the operation.⁸

When news of the North Korean invasion reached Washington very late on 24 June 1950 local time, the US government was

ill-prepared to meet the emergency. Truman was at his home in Independence, Missouri, and a number of other key decision-makers were away from the capital. Acheson rushed back to the State Department from his farm in Virginia and, after very brief discussions, telephoned the President recommending an emergency session of the Security Council be held to take action. Truman agreed without question.

The reasons why the Truman administration made this apparent snap decision to intervene in the Korean civil war have long been debated. The official reason given was that it could not ignore an open act of aggression since this would encourage Soviet adventurism elsewhere. But other factors were also at stake. Strategically, a Communist victory in Korea would jeopardize the security of Japan. Economically, the loss of South Korea would deprive Japan of much-needed resources and markets. And internationally, the United States had to act tough to reassure its allies, particularly in Europe, that it took its security commitments seriously. Political factors also played a role in the US decision to intervene in Korea. By mid-1950, 18 months after his shock victory in the 1948 presidential elections, Truman's domestic popularity had again begun to decline and Congressional bipartisan support for his foreign policy was disintegrating. The loss of Korea after China, therefore, was unthinkable, especially as the United States had invested heavily in the ROK and the fledgling country had become a symbol of containment in East Asia.⁹

What has been less discussed is why the US government opted to intervene in Korea through the UN. This action was perhaps surprising seeing as the Truman administration had purposefully bypassed the UN and acted unilaterally when dealing with earlier European issues, such as Greece, Turkey, Berlin and Western European economic recovery and security. Behind these earlier decisions was the knowledge that the Soviet Union would use its veto in the Security Council to block US policy in this vital Cold War theatre. Now, though, a number of other factors were in play that made the US decision to intervene through the UN almost inevitable. To start with, Truman had overseen the creation of the

world organization in 1945 and since then had publicly insisted that working through the UN was the central tenet of US foreign policy. At some level he also held idealistic convictions about the value of the UN. Demonstrating this most visibly was the fact that since a young age he had carried in his wallet a hand-written copy of a section of Alfred Lord Tennyson's utopian poem *Locksley Hall* stating:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard from heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a
ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing
warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the
thunder-storm;
Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle flags
were furl'd
In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.

The President and many of his subordinates thus worried that if the UN did not implement collective security measures to meet this first flagrant act of aggression since 1945, then the future of the organization would be jeopardized. He did not want the UN to share the fate of the League of Nations, which he partly blamed on the United States' failure to become a member.¹⁰

Working through the UN also made practical sense. Truman and Acheson were confident that the United States' global political, economic and military strength made it the dominant power at the UN, particularly in the General Assembly where it did not have to contend with the Soviet veto. Whatever policy it put forward in this forum invariably received the majority of votes since it could generally use its influence to command the support of all Western and Latin American members as well as most of the

nominally 'neutral' countries. In contrast, the Soviet bloc numbered just five and only a few neutral members were willing to stand up to Washington.

With this knowledge the Truman administration had, in fact, utilized the world organization on a number of occasions prior to the North Korean invasion to deal with less vital non-European matters. Most famously, Washington had used its dominance of the UN to facilitate the creation of the state of Israel. More significantly, the US government had also referred the problem of the independence of Korea to the General Assembly in 1947 and used the UN to establish the ROK a year later. In consequence, the Truman administration considered Korea a UN matter. In his oft-criticized and notorious speech to the National Press Club in January 1950, Acheson had tried to spell this out. Although he excluded Korea from the US defence perimeter in the Pacific, he also stated that if South Korea came under attack Washington would invoke 'the commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations'. Acheson's sincerity may be questioned in the context of his earlier lack of faith in the organization and his preference for negotiating with those states directly involved in specific issues, rather than small disinterested countries.¹¹ Even so, while clearly designed principally to deter Soviet aggression, Acheson's comments indicate that the US government did have a contingency plan ready for use if the ROK came under attack. In these circumstances the United States would seek to intervene in Korea through a UN collective security action. The speed with which the Truman administration decided to refer the Korean question to the Security Council suggests it was simply putting into effect this long-standing plan. Indeed, not to have utilized the UN would have been hypocritical.

Yet the US decision to intervene in Korea through the UN was also opportunistic. If Moscow had not been boycotting the Security Council over the Chinese representation question then Washington would surely have avoided the UN, realizing it could achieve little due to the Soviet veto. Truman hoped as well that a vigorous UN response would rekindle the American public's faith in the world organization that had been blunted by the inability of the Security

Locksley Hall Trumpton 1842

For I dip't into the future, as far
 as human eye could see,
 Saw the vision of the world, and all
 the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce,
 agencies of magic sails,
 Pilots of the purple twilight dropping
 down with costly bales;

Heard the Heavens fill with shouting,
 and there rained a ghastly dew,
 From the nations' airy navies grappling
 in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper
 of the Southwind rushing warm
 With the standards of the peoples plung-
 ing through the thunder storm;

Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer,
 and the battle flags were fur'd.
 In the Parliament of man, the Federation
 of the world.

Figure 2 Trumpton's handwritten copy of Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*.¹²

Council to act. Furthermore, the President also realized that intervening through the UN was still very important in persuading Congressional and public opinion that the United States was not alone in its endeavours to contain Soviet imperialism and that not only US soldiers would be fighting and dying in Korea.

* * *

While the origins of the Korean War have received an abundance of historical attention, the fate of the Commonwealth in the years preceding the conflict has received much less scrutiny. To understand its functioning at the UN during the Korean War fully it is essential to outline the nature of the organization, how its members perceived it and how they viewed their role in the UN. In doing so, it will become evident that the Commonwealth meant different things to different parties at different times. Still, the Commonwealth was not simply a symbolic organization based on a shared history. For all its members, to a greater or lesser extent, the Commonwealth continued to be an important means for furthering national interests and providing security.¹³

Before the Singapore Declaration of 1971 the Commonwealth had neither a formal organizational structure nor a set of unifying principles. It remained largely defined by its founding document, the 1931 Statute of Westminster. This effectively established the legislative independence and equality of the six Dominions—Australia, Canada, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa—that became known as the ‘Old’ Commonwealth members. The Statute also defined the Commonwealth as being ‘a free association . . . united by common allegiance to the Crown’. From the outset, therefore, the Commonwealth was a loosely-defined intergovernmental organization of independent states united by a shared Head of State. The only official contact its members had was at sporadic meetings on specific issues and roughly bi-annual Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conferences held in London at which common problems were dealt with informally. Yet in the Commonwealth capitals the High Commissions of the other

members held privileged positions and were kept in much closer and constant contact by the host government than the embassies of other countries. These ties were often strengthened by close personal relationships between Commonwealth diplomats and military figures present in other Commonwealth countries.

The Second World War undoubtedly marked the pinnacle of Commonwealth cooperation. Although Britain's inability to offer adequate protection led to periodic spats, for the most part all the Commonwealth members, with the exception of Ireland, united against the dire threat posed by the Axis Powers, and London became the focal point of wartime planning. At war's end the Commonwealth members optimistically hoped that the fledgling organization would continue to play an important global role. But the post-war world soon proved more complex. The composition of the organization expanded with India, Pakistan and Ceylon¹⁴ accepting Commonwealth membership when they gained independence. These states became known as the 'New' Commonwealth members. Then in 1949 two members left the Commonwealth. Newfoundland joined Canada while Ireland became a republic, a path that India seemed likely to follow. With the onset of the Cold War, however, India was considered too important to lose by the Old Commonwealth members, especially Britain, due to its strategic position and influence in Asia. Both factors made India vital to preventing the spread of communism. And so when it became a republic, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers agreed on the London Declaration. This allowed the inclusion of members who simply recognized the British Sovereign as Head of the Commonwealth, and not their Head of State, while also dropping the word 'British' from the organization's title.

These actions demonstrated the flexibility of the Old Commonwealth members, not to mention their strong desire to retain close relations with their new partners. Such sentiments were given further expression in January 1950 when the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers met in Colombo, Ceylon, to discuss raising living standards in Asia to prevent the spread of communism. This meeting resulted in the Colombo Plan, a framework for intergovernmental

arrangements for the economic and social development of the region. Although not officially launched until July 1951, the Colombo Plan quickly gained momentum as the developed Commonwealth members began providing aid, assistance, investment and training to the developing members. The Colombo Plan was the clearest indicator prior to the Korean War that the Commonwealth members were able and sincere in their efforts to work closely with each other to overcome international problems.¹⁵

Still, the importance of the Commonwealth to each of its members depended greatly on their specific foreign-policy priorities. The British Labour government was not overly sentimental towards the Empire. But Attlee, Bevin and Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Patrick Gordon Walker realized that a united Commonwealth under nominal British leadership helped to perpetuate Britain's Great Power status, in spite of growing indications of post-war decline. London also wished to incorporate Commonwealth forces into its global strategic plans, particularly in the Middle East, and maintain close economic relations to aid Britain's recovery. Moreover, the British hoped that by maintaining close relations with the New Commonwealth members, especially India, it could continue to influence events in the emerging Third World. Britain clearly had not abandoned all hope of maintaining a position of relative equality with the United States and USSR in world affairs.

Bevin, though, was wary of using the Commonwealth as a counterweight to US influence. Since the end of the Second World War the Labour Left, including influential figures such as Minister of Health Aneurin Bevan, as well as some right-wing Conservatives, had been calling for Britain to use its global influence, specifically its connections to the Commonwealth and Western Europe, to act as a 'Third Force' between the two superpowers.¹⁶ Despite some sympathy for the Third Force concept, Bevin's overriding focus, however, was on securing from Washington aid and military support for Europe and he was unwilling to take any measures that might jeopardize the achievement of these goals. Partly for this reason, along with its lack of faith in the utility of the organization following the breakdown of the wartime Grand Alliance, the Attlee government was generally content

to follow the United States' lead in the UN and had not attempted to use its nominal leadership of the Commonwealth to challenge US dominance. Even so, prior to the Korean War some debates at the UN had strained Anglo-American relations. For example, Britain had been reluctant to support the formation of Israel and it believed that the PRC should be seated at the UN. London was also much more eager than Washington to maintain the support of the neutral members whenever possible, believing that it had a better understanding of these Arab and Asian countries than the less experienced Americans.¹⁷

After Britain, Australia and New Zealand were the most emotionally attached members of the Commonwealth. The Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers, Robert Menzies and Sidney Holland, were both fervent Anglophiles and looked to Britain to provide leadership. They also recognized that Australia and New Zealand remained closely tied to Britain in a number of ways. Until the late 1940s their foreign policy bureaucracies remained under British dominance. Economically, too, the sterling area continued to be of great importance to these countries since Britain was their main trading partner. And the Australian and New Zealand armed forces were closely tied to Britain, as demonstrated by their continued commitment to defend the Middle East in a global conflict.

Yet there were limits to their Commonwealth attachment. Menzies and Holland disliked the admission of non-white Commonwealth members. Their Ministers for External Affairs, Percy Spender and Frederick Doidge, also placed greater emphasis on courting US support for a Pacific security pact than on Commonwealth loyalty. Inside the UN, then, Australia and New Zealand, recognizing they were smaller powers that could not decisively influence events, rarely sought to discuss matters with their Commonwealth partners. Instead, they tended to support US policy without raising too many questions and complaints.¹⁸

In comparison, since the end of the First World War Canada had displayed much greater political, economic and military independence from Britain and it did not hold the Commonwealth in as high esteem. To begin with, Canada had its own 'special'

relationship with the United States, while its Francophone population, including Liberal Prime Minister Louis St Laurent, had few emotional ties to the British Empire. St Laurent's Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester Pearson also thought the Commonwealth anachronistic.

Still, the post-war Canadian government supported the Commonwealth partly because of its new multiethnic composition. St Laurent had, in fact, been instrumental in drafting the 1949 London Declaration, determined to retain Indian membership. Pearson also wished to maintain close relations with his Commonwealth colleagues since he realized that by itself Canada lacked the ability to influence global events but that it might punch above its weight by operating as part of a united Commonwealth. Pearson was particularly confident about the possibility of acting this way in the UN, where he hoped that Canada, as a middle power, could combine with other likeminded members to play a useful mediatory role between the two superpowers. Even so, with the intensification of the Cold War Canada's room for manoeuvre had lessened, and recently it had offered consistent support for US policy in the world organization.¹⁹

For its part, the Nationalist South African government of Prime Minister Dr Daniel Malan had little desire to promote a multiethnic 'British' Commonwealth. Since its election in 1948, the Malan government had focused on establishing the *apartheid* system. These reforms heightened existing tensions between South Africa and the other Commonwealth members, particularly India, but even Malan was not prepared to turn his back completely on the organization. During his election campaign, in a ploy to win votes from the English-speaking community, he had dropped calls to make South Africa a republic. More importantly, with Cold War tensions mounting, Malan, as a staunch anti-Communist, sought to maintain close relations with the Old Commonwealth members, especially Britain, for security reasons. In addition, the South African economy was closely linked to Britain and the Empire. Malan also found working within the Commonwealth preferable to the UN, where South Africa generally played a passive role except when its domestic policies came under attack.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, the New Commonwealth members did not wish to overtly promote an organization that reminded them of their former colonial status. In fact, both Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Liaquat Ali-Khan of Pakistan wished to assert their independence. Nevertheless, the governing elites in India and Pakistan retained close cultural and personal ties with Britain, respected the British liberal democratic tradition and realized that their shaky economies and precarious external security were inextricably connected to the Commonwealth. Ironically, with Kashmir a constant threat to regional stability and a source of friction within the Commonwealth since the Indo-Pakistani War following partition in 1947, India and Pakistan also used Commonwealth membership as a means for building bridges and keeping an eye on each other.

But naturally these two states approached the Commonwealth from very different perspectives. Nehru hoped to use the Commonwealth to counter-balance US dominance of the non-Communist world, increase India's global standing and promote Asian issues and his message of non-alignment. Like Pearson, he saw the UN as a particularly important venue, since here India could play a decisive mediatory role, using its Commonwealth connections and nominal leadership of the Arab-Asian neutral bloc to counterbalance the influence of the two superpowers. In stark contrast, Liaquat Ali-Khan increasingly saw Commonwealth and UN membership as a way to build closer security relations with the United States and increase Pakistan's international status vis-à-vis India. By 1950 this policy was bearing some fruit, with Washington gradually coming to view Pakistan as a vital link in its containment chain ringing the Soviet Union. Partly as a result of this development, Nehru became increasingly suspicious of the United States, fearing that the support it was giving Karachi was boosting Pakistan's position in Kashmir.²¹

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On the morning of 25 June 1950, then, even before the Security Council met, a degree of inevitability existed about what would transpire. The US delegation would almost certainly take the lead in