

and the declaration of a “protectorate” over the country. President Theodore Roosevelt, in the interest of balancing Japanese and Russian power in Northeast Asia, endorsed Tokyo’s direction of Korean affairs. Finally, in 1910, Japan formally annexed the kingdom, establishing a brutal regime that lasted until Japan’s defeat by the Allied powers in 1945.

Before the end of that global conflict, Allied leaders agreed to set up a United Nations “trusteeship” over Korea, with the United States and the Soviet Union occupying Korea on either side of the 38th parallel, which was intended to be only a temporary dividing line. After disarming Japanese forces, the occupying powers planned to withdraw and re-

store Korea’s independence. To carry out this mandate, in August and September 1945, Soviet and U.S. troops moved into their respective occupation zones in North and South Korea.

Ideological conflict and balance-of-power politics after



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Syngman Rhee, President of the Republic of Korea. An American-educated nationalist, Rhee was a vehement anti-Communist.

World War II soon disrupted the process of Korean unification and independence. The world witnessed the dawning of the “Cold War.” The United States and the other Western allies were increasingly at odds with the USSR and its ruthless dictator, Joseph Stalin. The Soviets suppressed basic freedoms and undermined governments in Poland, Czechoslovakia and the other eastern European nations that had been occupied by the Red Army. Moscow fueled an insurgency in Greece and made territorial demands on Turkey and Iran. In 1946, Mao Zedong’s Chinese Communists launched an all-out campaign against Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government that would culminate several years later in the conquest of the entire mainland of China. The Soviet menace loomed especially large in August 1949 when the USSR detonated an atomic bomb, ending the U.S. monopoly of these weapons of mass destruction.

Meanwhile, in Korea, the Soviets supported the ascendancy of Kim Il Sung, a Communist leader whose forces had fought the Japanese in North China and Manchuria during the war. U.S. officials favored Dr. Syngman Rhee, an American-educated nationalist, and his ardent anti-Communist supporters. In both sections of the country, the Korean antagonists suppressed their opponents, often ruthlessly. Voters south of the



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Kim Il Sung, leader of the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea, gives a speech in 1948 with a depiction of a united Korean peninsula behind him.

President Harry S. Truman. He implemented the containment strategy to deal with Communism but believed in strengthening at-risk nations with American military equipment and advisers, rather than deploying large U.S. conventional forces overseas. Indeed, he acted to reduce U.S. defense expenditures during the 1945-1950 period.

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38th parallel eventually elected Rhee as the first President of the Republic of Korea, formally established on 15 August 1948. The following month Kim Il Sung announced his leadership of a second political creation, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

During the next year and a half, the two Korean governments engaged in low-level hostilities. They sent agents, saboteurs and raiding forces across the 38th parallel and fought artillery duels along the dividing line. In the last six months of 1949 alone, there were over 400 "border incidents."

With the establishment of friendly regimes in their respective occupation zones, the USSR and the U.S. withdrew their occupation forces. The Soviet armed forces left behind a military advisory group and large amounts of World War II-vintage munitions and equipment, including tanks, artillery and combat aircraft. The North Korean armed forces continued to grow in numbers and capability under Soviet tutelage.

Except for the 500-man Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), the United States withdrew all of its forces from Korea by June 1949. They left behind large quantities of small arms and ammunition, but, unlike the Soviets, no tanks, medium or heavy artillery or combat aircraft. The administration

of Harry S. Truman opposed giving Rhee such "offensive" weapons, fearing that he would try to unify Korea by force. The Americans thought Rhee's new government needed only U.S. training of its armed forces, modest arms supplies and economic and political support.

The simultaneous draw down of U.S. conventional forces and reliance on military advisers and assistance reflected the Truman administration's global approach to the threat posed by the Soviet Union and its allies after World War II. In 1947, President Truman proclaimed a new strategy for dealing with the Communists' militant and expansive policies-containment. The United States and her allies would prevent the spread of Communist ideology and Soviet influence by

strengthening the economies, political systems and military organizations of friendly countries. The containment strategy anticipated using U.S. ground troops, tactical aircraft units, combat fleets and other conventional forces to defend only vital national interests.

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## Reduced Forces

At the end of World War II, the U.S. armed forces comprised 12.4 million men and women who had answered the greatest call to the colors in American history. This massive establishment fielded 95 infantry, armor, airborne and Marine divisions; 92,000 aircraft; 1,307 warships; and 82,000 landing craft. But, with the war now over, the American public clamored to "bring the boys home." Operation Magic Carpet and similar move-

ments transported millions of American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines home to the United States and then discharged them from the military.

Another motivation for the reduction of the military establishment was Truman's desire to improve America's financial health. Being the "Arsenal of Democracy" in World War II had been a great drain on the public treasury of the United States and had disrupted

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the production of consumer goods. Truman believed that it was more important to balance the budget and encourage the private sector than to buy new weapons or station large forces overseas.

Key leaders in Washington also suggested that the U.S. could reduce defense spending significantly because America had the atomic bomb. Proponents concluded that the American atomic arsenal (which was not that powerful or ready for war during the 1945-1950 period) either would deter or defeat Soviet invasions of vital areas, such as western Europe. The U.S. Air Force, separated from the Army in 1947, believed that the delivery of atomic weapons should be the mission of only its bombers. The Air Force argued that this made conventional forces, especially Navy carrier forces, much less valuable and that they should be reduced in number and capability. The Navy countered that a balanced military establishment, in which no weapon system or service predominated, best served the global interests of the United States.

All the services were involved in sometimes acrimonious disputes over dwindling budgets, their respective roles and missions in the new postwar world, and unification of the defense establishment. James V. Forrestal, the first Secretary of Defense (the National Military Establishment, later

to become the Department of Defense, was established in 1947), literally worked himself to death trying to accommodate the differing views of each service. His successor, Louis V. Johnson, an incompetent political appointee with little experience in defense matters, reinforced Truman's inclination to drastically cut the defense budget. Johnson also accepted the proposition that only the Air Force should be allowed to conduct long-range atomic bombing. Without consulting the Navy's civilian or military leaders, he canceled construction of *United States* (CVA 58), the first aircraft carrier designed to carry atomic-capable aircraft. In the uproar over this and other issues, collectively called

the "Revolt of the Admirals," Secretary of the Navy John L. Sullivan resigned in protest and his successor forced Admiral Louis E. Denfeld, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), to retire.

During the period from 1945 to 1950, all the services suffered from the loss of critical resources. The last budget approved by Congress before the outbreak of the Korean War provided for only 238 naval combatants, including 6 fleet aircraft carriers, 1 reduced-status battleship and 9 carrier air groups; 6 battalions and 12 aircraft squadrons for the Marines; and 14 reduced-strength Army divisions. Even the favored Air Force was expected to operate with 48 air groups instead of the 71 it considered essential.

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## The Road to War

In early 1950, international miscalculation over Korea resulted in war. For several years, Kim Il Sung had urged his Communist patrons to support a North Korean invasion of South Korea but they refused him each time. The leaders of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China did not want a major war to break out in northeast Asia. Stalin was more concerned about the growing strength of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance in Europe. Mao Zedong was concentrat-

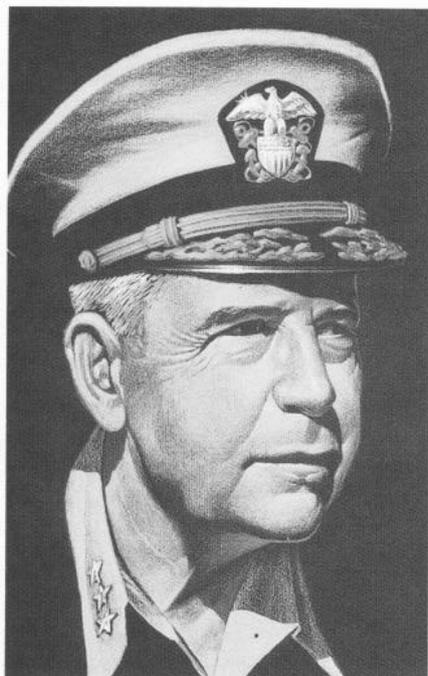
ing his forces for the invasion of Taiwan and climactic last battle with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.

The United States did not want a war in Asia, either. The Truman administration focused its attention and the combat power of the U.S. military on Europe. Truman and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, were determined to limit U.S. Far Eastern commitments, a desire unfortunately made public. On 12 January 1950, Acheson told the Washington press corps that the United

States would fight to defend Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines but, by failing to mention them, neither Taiwan nor Korea. So, when Kim once again asked Moscow and Beijing to approve his plans to conquer South Korea, they agreed, although Mao Zedong was somewhat reluctant. However, Mao promised to send the substantial number of ethnic Koreans in the Chinese Communist forces back to Kim.

By the late spring of 1950, the North Koreans had amassed formidable military forces. The NKPA then consisted of 135,000 men. The principal ground elements of this force were 10 infantry divisions, an armored brigade, 2 independent regiments and border constabulary troops. Two of these divisions recently had returned from China; many of the other soldiers were veterans of Mao's forces. The NKPA fielded 150 Soviet-made T-34 tanks, hundreds of light and medium artillery pieces and numerous heavy mortars. The North Korean Air Force included 70 Yak-3 and Yak-7 fighters and 60 Ilyshin 11-10 "Shturmovik" attack planes, all propeller driven. The navy operated a few small patrol boats.

The Republic of Korea military was inferior to the NKPA in quantity and quality. The ROK Army, composed of eight infantry divisions, various support units and headquarter



Navy Art Collection

Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, Commander Naval Forces, Far East, by Navy combat artist Herbert Hahn.

ters elements, numbered only 100,000 men. They lacked good field artillery and had no tanks. The air force flew only 20 unarmed training planes. The South Korean Navy (ROKN) manned 17 old U.S. and Japanese minesweepers, a few picket boats, one tank landing ship and one subchaser, renamed *Bak Du San* (PC 701), which the U.S. Navy sold to the Koreans in 1949.

The U.S. naval forces in the western Pacific in June 1950 were a pale reflection of the mighty armada that surrounded the battleship Missouri (BB 63) at Tokyo Bay in September 1945. Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble, a veteran of World War II amphibious

operations in the Philippines, commanded the Seventh Fleet, based at Subic Bay in the Philippines. In this fleet steamed fleet aircraft carrier *Valley Forge* (CV 45), heavy cruiser *Rochester* (CA 124), 8 destroyers, 4 submarines and 5 logistics support ships. Fleet Air Wing 1, with two patrol squadrons, provided the fleet with long-range search and reconnaissance aircraft. Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, Commander Naval Forces, Japan, led a force that consisted of light cruiser *Juneau* (CLAA 119), the 4 ships of Destroyer Division 91 and the 7 minesweepers of Mine Squadron 3. Also under Admiral Joy were the five ships of Rear Admiral James H. Doyle's Amphibious Group 1. Joy was also Commander Naval Forces, Far East, and in the event of an emergency, Seventh Fleet would come under his direction, as well.

The closest American ground forces to the Korean peninsula were the four infantry divisions of Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker's Eighth Army, which served as the occupation force for Japan's Home Islands. Walker's units—the 7th, 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions and the 1st Cavalry Division (also infantry)—were in poor shape. Because of postwar defense cutbacks, these units were severely undermanned and badly equipped. Much of their material had been salvaged from World War II battlefields

and restored in Japanese shops. Lacking adequate training and resources, and softened by occupation duty, the American troops in Japan were ill-prepared for war.

Manpower and material shortages also hobbled the U.S. Far East Air Force (FEAF), commanded by Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer. FEAF was made up of three air forces—the 20th, 13th and 5th, which operated from Okinawa and the Mariana Islands, the Philippines and Japan. FEAF operated mostly jet-powered Lockheed F-80 Shooting Stars in both the fighter and fighter-bomber roles, even though they were not well-suited to the latter mission. The only planes in FEAF designed solely for the attack role were the propeller-driven Douglas B-26 Invaders of the 3rd Bombardment Wing (Light). Also flying with FEAF were North American F-82 Twin Mustang all-

weather fighters, Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers and Douglas C-54 Skymaster transports.

While the United States could not assume it would be supported by its World War II allies in any new crisis, Australian and British forces operated in the region during early 1950. Australian occupation forces stationed in the Japanese islands were an infantry battalion, a fighter squadron equipped with North American F-51 Mustangs and the frigate HMAS *Shoalhaven* (K 535). The UN was fortunate that in June 1950 light aircraft carrier HMS *Triumph*, 2 light cruisers, 2 destroyers and 3 frigates of the Royal Navy's Far East Station were steaming toward Japan to escape the summer heat at their Southeast Asian home ports.

As U.S., Australian and British forces in the Far East carried out business as

usual in the late spring of 1950, there were ominous developments on the Korean peninsula. After months of probing south across the border, in May the NKPA suddenly halted such activity. Intelligence sources in Taiwan and South Korea warned that the Communists would soon take stronger armed action. These warnings, however, fell on deaf ears. American political and military leaders believed that none of the countries interested in the Korean situation would benefit from a war on the Korean peninsula. KMAC officers told visiting American officials that all was quiet on the Korean front. On 19 June, the Central Intelligence Agency forecast that the North Koreans would continue their low-level hostilities near the 38th parallel but not launch a major attack across it that summer.



South Korean military leaders brief visiting dignitaries on the defenses at the 39th parallel on 18 June 1950. Listening intently are John Foster Dulles, President Truman's special representative and later Secretary of State; Sihn Seung Mo, the South Korean Minister of Defense; and U.S. military advisers. Few Americans or South Koreans, however, expected a North Korean invasion. One week after this photograph was taken, North Korean tanks and infantry units poured through this position.

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