

# ZERO-SUM GAME

ARMISTICE NEGOTIATIONS IN KOREA, 1951-1953

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the Korean War negotiations. Most of the dimensions of negotiation theory were in play at the table in Korea. The paper will cover the prenegotiating, preparation and negotiating phases. The analytical framework for examining the negotiations process will include: an overview of the Containment policy, with a view toward understanding the role of historical context in the prenegotiation and negotiation processes; a historical overview of the Korean War and armistice negotiations; the theory of limited war; the roles of culture and ideology in shaping the parties' perceptions, and their approach to negotiation; the characteristics of threats, and why Eisenhower's threat in 1953 appeared to be decisive where Truman had failed; and The elements of negotiating power, and how negotiating power differs from national diplomatic, economic, and military power.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are few creative solutions in war. Negotiating an end to hostilities is thus a task of epic proportions. Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz defined war as “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”<sup>1</sup> That is a poor starting point for integrative, or “principled,” negotiation of the type advocated in *Getting to YES*<sup>2</sup> and other recent literature on negotiation theory. The passions aroused in wartime complicate attempts to craft a post-war order which is simultaneously favorable for the victor, and not unduly harsh for the vanquished.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the very idea of one side *compelling* the other to do its will — the essence of warfare — runs counter to the concept of searching for joint solutions benefiting both sides. Positional bargaining is the rule in war-termination negotiations.

The Korean War was no exception. For the first time, America confronted a communist power on the battlefield, as the deepening Cold War suddenly flared into open warfare. Hurriedly marshaling a coalition under the aegis of the United Nations, the United States dispatched a massive expeditionary force to do the previously unthinkable: fight a land war in Asia in response to aggression sponsored by the Soviet Union, an erstwhile ally. The first limited war in modern American history involved roughly a year of intense fighting, followed by two years of battlefield stalemate and frustrating negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Fisher, William L. Ury, and Bruce M. Patton, *Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

How did things come to such a pass? How did the powerful United States, flush with victory over fascism and Japanese militarism, become bogged down in a lengthy war against a third-class power? Why was it unable to translate battlefield victory into political success through the medium of negotiation? How did the Chinese and North Koreans manage to prolong the conflict and regain the *status quo ante bellum* after a crushing military defeat? How did they improve their alternatives to a negotiated settlement, and worsen those of the United States? Why did Eisenhower's threat of nuclear weapons prove to be credible, and was it really the deciding factor? Given that no final peace treaty was adopted, to what extent can the negotiations be considered successful? Could the process have been improved? Where appropriate, the paper will address methods of improving American diplomacy in bringing war to an early conclusion. Answering these questions may provide general lessons for the negotiator, particularly in the realm of peace settlement.

The goal of this paper is not to take part in the bitter and, in my view, sterile debate among academicians seeking to assign responsibility — read blame — for the Cold War. The conclusions advanced herein are necessarily somewhat tentative, since Westerners have little access to Chinese and North Korean documents, and the Soviet archives are still being sifted through. If the debate over Cold War history teaches one thing, it is that perception and misperception are crucial factors in diplomacy, war, and, by extension, the

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<sup>3</sup> History has repeatedly demonstrated the need to avoid leaving a revanchist power to initiate a new round of fighting.

negotiation process. Without access to their documents, it is difficult to make definitive statements about the motivations and perceptions of communist statesmen.

Most of the dimensions of negotiation theory were in play at the table in Korea. This paper does not aspire to be a comprehensive history of the Korean War, but to point up aspects of that conflict which tie into negotiation theory; hence it dwells on events and decisions which will be revisited in the analytical sections. The paper will cover the prenegotiating, preparation and negotiating phases. The analytical framework for examining the negotiations process will include:

- An overview of the Containment policy, with a view toward understanding the role of historical context in the prenegotiation and negotiation processes;
- A historical overview of the Korean War and armistice negotiations, emphasizing the events necessary for later analysis;
- The theory of limited war, and why it is difficult to achieve political victory in limited wars;
- The roles of culture and ideology in shaping the parties' perceptions, and their approach to negotiation;
- The difficulty in building trust in the impassioned climate of warfare;
- The advantages of controlling the negotiating site;
- Internal dynamics among allies on each side, and within individual countries;
- The theoretical dimensions of crises, and the implications of war ceasing to be a "crisis" for one or both parties;
- The role of statesmen's and negotiators' reputations in building credibility;
- The characteristics of threats, and why Eisenhower's threat in 1953 appeared to be decisive where Truman had failed; and

- The elements of negotiating power, and how negotiating power differs from national diplomatic, economic, and military power.

These elements converged to produce an intensely confrontational, prolonged negotiation process marked by venomous ideological conflict, and accompanied by the blustering and posturing which are a prominent feature of ideological crusades. At the outset, communist statesmen were vastly superior to their UN counterparts at integrating diplomacy with military power. The United States and its allies were only able to prevail after adopting the same approach. It is fair to say that force — the lowest common denominator — was the ultimate arbiter of the Korean settlement.

#### CONTAINMENT: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Saint Augustine observed that “every man seeks peace by waging war, but no man seeks war by making peace. For even they who intentionally interrupt the peace in which they are living have no hatred of peace, but only wish it changed into a peace which suits them better.”<sup>4</sup> Hence the central question in wartime is, whose vision of peace will prevail. Conflicting visions may lead to competition, confrontation, and even violence. That was certainly the case in the forty-year contest known as the Cold War. Wartime cooperation against Nazi Germany proved to be short-lived; indeed, by 1949, George F. Kennan, ambassador to the Soviet Union, observed in his memoirs that a Nazi-like image of the USSR had taken hold in American policy circles. Such an image, not surprisingly, had tremendous political implications. For his part, Joseph Stalin resented Western meddling

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 19.12.

in a sphere of interest thought to be earned by the Red Army in the Great Patriotic War.<sup>5</sup> Hopes of a postwar rapprochement were soon dashed.

How did things come to such a pass? The so-called “lessons of history” provide part of the answer. From events of the interwar years, culminating in the Second World War, statesmen drew the lesson that appeasement anywhere encouraged aggression, and consequently threatened peace and security everywhere. That was the essence of collective security. Dealing with dictators was held to be equivalent to appeasing Hitler, and hence was anathema for Western politicians.<sup>6</sup> Once the West equated communism with Nazism, confrontation was inevitable. In justifying the war in Korea, President Truman declared that, if

the history of the 1930’s teaches us anything, it is that appeasement of dictators is the sure road to world war. If aggression were allowed to succeed in Korea, it would be an open invitation to new acts of aggression elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

There was adequate reason to make such a connection. The postwar period seemed to be an unending litany of communist treachery and attempts at expansion. Unsuccessful, Soviet-sponsored bids to overthrow the Greek and Turkish governments; the Berlin Blockade; the successful coup in Czechoslovakia; Moscow’s refusal to withdraw the Red

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<sup>5</sup> William Taubman, *Stalin’s American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> This reading of history remains current even today. President Bush invoked the need to avoid appeasement as justification for the allied military buildup in Saudi Arabia in 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Radio Address by the President (Truman) on the Aims and Objectives in Resisting Aggression in Korea, September 1, 1950, in Raymond Dennett and Robert K. Turner, ed., *Documents on American Foreign Relations*, Vol. XII: *January 1 - December 31, 1950*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 10. (Hereafter *DAFR*, 1950)

Army from Eastern Europe and Iran;<sup>8</sup> and Mao Tse-Tung's victory in the Chinese Civil War<sup>9</sup> presented Western statesmen with the image of a worldwide push for communist domination. If the United Nations had been crafted to guard against a repetition of the 1930s, it fell woefully short of expectations. Great-power cooperation foundered on misperception and mutual distrust, and former allies soon regarded each other as mortal foes.

In the face of this perceived threat to its survival, the United States shed its long-standing tradition of Unilateralism, of shunning "entangling alliances," in favor of peacetime engagement;<sup>10</sup> and by 1947 the outlines of Containment policy were visible. In the famous Long Telegram and the subsequent "X" article in *Foreign Affairs*, George F. Kennan described the Soviet system and proposed policy objectives and strategies for containing the expansion of communism. Kennan sketched the tenets of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and his view of Soviet policy vis-à-vis the West. The upshot for U.S. policy-makers was that

the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. It is important to note, however, that *such a policy has nothing to do with outward histrionics: with threats or blustering or superfluous gestures of outward "toughness"*<sup>11</sup> (emphasis added).

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<sup>8</sup> Radio Report to the American People on Korea and on U.S. Policy in the Far East, April 11, 1951, reprinted in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1951*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 224. (Hereafter *PPPUS, Truman*)

<sup>9</sup> Address by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, "Implications of the Treaty of Alliance and Related Agreements between the Soviet Union and Communist China," March 15, 1950, reprinted in U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), pp. 2465-68. (Hereafter *AFP*)

<sup>10</sup> Walter A. MacDougall, "Back to Bedrock," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1997, pp. 134-46.

<sup>11</sup> [George F. Kennan]. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, p. 575.

An insightful observer of American political culture, Kennan well understood his countrymen's urge to grand crusades, and the consequences of grandiose policies for foreign policy; hence the admonitions against "blustering" and shows of toughness. He argued that comparisons of the USSR with Nazi Germany were misplaced, since Marxist-Leninist ideology emphasized that "centrifugal forces" would inevitably destroy capitalism from within. Soviet strategists, he reasoned, therefore had no immediate plans to act to speed the downfall of the West. Kennan's was a pragmatic vision, based on the firm application of all the diplomatic, economic and military tools at Washington's disposal to defend strategic geographic locations. There was no intent to engage Moscow militarily in peripheral locations, and indeed he was careful to deemphasize the use of the military instrument. John Wayne had no place in George Kennan's concept of Containment.

Containment took a different form in practice. In 1947, President Truman articulated the Truman Doctrine, providing for economic support to beleaguered governments — Greece and Turkey were in danger at the time — that were resisting communist insurgencies. The policy quickly gained a symmetrical dimension, with opposition to communist expansion wherever it might appear. Significantly, the Truman Doctrine was extended to all of Asia,<sup>12</sup> whereas Kennan had insisted that only Japan was critical in the Far East. This was consistent with Truman's later insistence in his memoirs, on the subject of responding in Korea, that

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<sup>12</sup> *AFP*, p. 2463.

If the Communists were permitted to force their way into the Republic of Korea without opposition from the free world, no small nation would have the courage to resist threats and aggression by stronger Communist neighbors.<sup>13</sup>

In Truman's analysis, a chain of events would result from U.S. failure to respond to limited aggression, ultimately leading to a third world war. A parallel development was the increasing reliance on military means to execute the Containment policy, and the appearance of saber-rattling overtones in U.S. diplomacy. In 1950, the National Security Council issued NSC 68, which described the Soviet challenge in apocalyptic terms and recommended strategies to resist expansion. The Soviet Union's repressive character in domestic affairs, it was assumed, would spill over into its international conduct. The Kremlin was assessed as placing a premium on a surprise attack on the United States or Western Europe, and consequently NSC 68 recommended a "rapid build-up of political, economic and military strength in the Free World."<sup>14</sup> Such a buildup of armed strength would remedy the effects of severe postwar defense cuts which, it was thought, had encouraged aggression. Military confrontation henceforth took center stage in U.S. strategy; an analyst has noted that "[n]egotiations would play an insignificant role if NSC 68 drafters got their way."<sup>15</sup> Kennan was horrified by the subversion of his brainchild. Though not implemented completely, the attitudes enshrined in NSC 68 held sway by the outbreak of the Korean War.

The flaw in Containment theory was that perceptive communist statesmen might try to break out of it in a limited way, under the threshold for a U.S. nuclear response.

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<sup>13</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2: *Years of Trial and Hope*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1956), p. 333.

<sup>14</sup> NSC 68, in Taubman, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

They sought to exploit America's preoccupation with Europe, and its drastic postwar force cuts, by thrusting into peripheral areas of maximum strategic and political complexity.

The nuclear threat would be rendered impotent, as such a drastic response to limited war — smashing a gnat with a sledgehammer — was thought to be implausible. It was a clever approach, since the “possibility of a Soviet thrust elsewhere [than Europe] had the character of an afterthought, if that”<sup>16</sup> for U.S. policy-makers. The communists had deftly avoided the brunt of American policy.

Statesmen on the other side of the Iron Curtain had moved to a similarly hard-line stance by 1950. The United States and its allies perceived an immediate threat to Western Europe, where, it is likely, Stalin had no immediate designs after a devastating war. Ever cautious, he was content, for the time being, to consolidate gains won with the blood of Soviet soldiers. He sought to exploit rifts in the West by whatever means possible: by peace offensives or by threats, depending on the diplomatic conditions of the moment. Firmness was the hallmark of Stalin's approach to diplomacy, as will be seen below. Since he had no intention of invading the West, Stalin viewed the virulent anticommunist rhetoric emanating from Western capitals as a tool to rouse the populations for war. Hence, he thought, saber-rattling was a prelude to invasion of Eastern Europe. By 1949, Stalin had retreated from the brand of postwar *détente* he had practiced since 1945, with negotiations taking a back seat to propaganda, and to limited expansion where possible. He was intensely suspicious of American interference in the Soviet sphere of influence.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 474.

Misperceptions reigned supreme on both sides: while “for the Americans, the former would-be angel had become a devil, as malevolent as he had once been benign,” in Moscow “the Americans struck Stalin as simultaneously dangerous and innocent... . His image of them reflected both his ideological assumptions and his own Soviet experience.”<sup>17</sup> The stage was set for confrontation in Korea: both sides were predisposed to view their competition in military terms, and act accordingly.

### THE KOREAN WAR:

#### INVASION, PITCHED BATTLES, AND MILITARY STALEMATE

*In the simplest terms, what we are doing in Korea is this: we are trying to prevent a third world war.*<sup>18</sup>

**Harry S. Truman**, April 11, 1951

With a kind of perverse cosmic justice, a major American diplomatic blunder precipitated a war which was to end with prolonged, agonizing negotiations. The Korean peninsula had been occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union after the surrender of Japanese forces in 1945, with the country divided roughly at the 38th parallel. Expansion of the deepening Cold War to Korea was swift, with the imposition of Soviet-style land reform and communist ideology in the north, and the right-wing, U.S.-backed government of Syngman Rhee in the south. The joint Soviet-American commission on Korea was unable to agree on the originally envisioned all-Korean elections, so the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) was formed in the north in 1948, with Kim Il-sung as president, followed shortly by the Republic of Korea (ROK), with Rhee as

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226-27.

<sup>18</sup> Address by the President, “United States Policy in the Korean Conflict,” April 11, 1951, *AFP*, p. 2609.

president. Both countries claimed jurisdiction over the entire peninsula, and border clashes were common.<sup>19</sup>

The American diplomatic miscue came in 1949 and early 1950, with public statements by General Douglas MacArthur, commander in chief of U.S. forces in the Far East, and Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Acheson, in a speech to the National Press Club in Washington on January 12, 1950, described the U.S. defense perimeter in the Far East, which encompassed the Philippines and, of course, Japan. Korea was pointedly excluded, with the remark that “it must be clear that no person can guarantee [areas outside the U.S. defense perimeter] against military attack.”<sup>20</sup> This reflected the conventional wisdom that a land war on the Asian mainland would be suicidal. His statement, echoing a similar one by MacArthur in 1949, signaled inadvertently that the United States would not defend Korea against an attack from the north.

Communist leaders received the message. Spurred by Acheson’s statement, and by the decrepit state of the U.S. armed forces, North Korean forces poured across the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950, quickly overrunning weak South Korean defenses.<sup>21</sup> They were not acting alone. “American military weakness,” observed a recent analyst of Soviet policy, “along with the ambiguity of Washington’s commitment to South Korea,

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<sup>19</sup> Edgar O’Ballance, *Korea: 1950-1953*, (Malabar: Krieger, 1955), p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Remarks by the Secretary of State (Acheson) before the National Press Club, Washington, January 12, 1950, *DAFR*, 1950, p. 431.

<sup>21</sup> Telegram from the American Ambassador at Seoul to the Secretary of State, June 25, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2536. North Korea alleged a South Korean invasion of the north, a version later found by the United Nations to be false. The U.S. had deliberately kept Rhee’s forces small in order to discourage efforts to reunify the peninsula by force.

[encouraged] Moscow to authorize if not initiate the North Korean invasion."<sup>22</sup> The Soviet Union, indeed, provided the bulk of military hardware and supplies throughout the conflict. Undoubtedly, the communists hoped for a quick, painless victory, and to present Washington with a *fait accompli*.

Contrary to expectations, the United States' reaction was prompt; and Containment entered a new phase. Shrugging off its reluctance to fight in Asia, the U.S. dispatched a request for UN action on June 25. In the meantime President Truman ordered naval and air support for the South Korean government,<sup>23</sup> after receiving quiet assurances that Soviet troops would not be involved in the campaign.<sup>24</sup> Both sides adhered to the polite fiction of Soviet non-involvement remained throughout the conflict. The Security Council, in the absence of the Soviet Union's representative,<sup>25</sup> called on the North Koreans to withdraw on June 25, and recommended on June 27 that UN member states "furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area."<sup>26</sup> Truman ordered the commitment of ground forces to Korea on June 29, and in the following days, the United States was officially designated to spearhead operations in Korea,<sup>27</sup> with General MacArthur assigned as commander in chief of the unified command (UNC) and commander of the U.S. Eighth

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<sup>22</sup> Taubman, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>23</sup> Statement by the President, "Initial Measures Taken by the United States in the Korean Crisis," June 27, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2539.

<sup>24</sup> Inaugurating the tacit Cold War agreement that the superpowers' forces would not meet in open combat. This mitigated the possibility of an "accidental" world war.

<sup>25</sup> Over the installation of the Nationalist Chinese in the Chinese seat on the Security Council.

<sup>26</sup> Resolution of the United Nations Security Council, June 27, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2541.

<sup>27</sup> Resolution of the United Nations Security Council, July 7, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2550.

Army.<sup>28</sup> Events reflected a dual misperception: the Soviet Union believed the United States would not resist in Korea when it had conceded China; and America was concerned with allowing communist aggression to go unopposed.

While American and allied forces rushed to Korea, the president sought to rally support at home, with considerable success. He invoked the aforementioned “lessons of history,” and launched a massive defense buildup, partly implementing the recommendations of NSC 68.<sup>29</sup> He viewed Korea through the lens of Containment, as enshrined in NSC 68. “The fateful events of the 1930’s when aggression unopposed bred more aggression and eventually war, were fresh in our memory,” Truman proclaimed. “But the free nations had learned the lesson of history.”<sup>30</sup> One lesson he drew was that Korea was a feint before a Soviet assault on Western Europe; thus fighting on the periphery was a way to prevent a third world war. Additionally, communist aggression was held to be a blow to the newly crafted edifice of collective security and to the viability of international law:

This outright breach of the peace, in violation of the United Nations Charter, created a real and present danger to the security of every nation. ... If this challenge had not been met squarely, the effectiveness of the United Nations would have been all but ended... .<sup>31</sup>

While breathtaking in its appeal to the American crusading spirit, the absolute nature of the president’s rhetoric would later complicate the waging of a limited war, as well as diplomatic efforts to end the war. He portrayed Korea as a threat to the survival of

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<sup>28</sup> Resolution of the United Nations Security Council, July 18, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2551.

<sup>29</sup> Ironically, more U.S. forces were sent to Europe during the Korean War than to Korea, since Korea was viewed as a precursor to general war.

<sup>30</sup> Report by the President to the Congress on the Situation in Korea, July 19, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2554.

American civilization, as a virtual invitation to World War III: "If we do not succeed...then the cause of self-government, the cause of human freedom, is lost."<sup>32</sup> Truman was an effective orator, and the war was popular in the early going.

American political aims and strategy were simple. Though the United States and South Korea strongly desired reunification of the peninsula under Seoul's leadership, this was not part of Truman's initial policy. Sufficient force would be deployed to repel the North Korean assault and restore the *status quo ante bellum* at the 38th parallel. Attainment of even this limited goal appeared unlikely in the summer of 1950, as the South Korean army, along with leading elements of the U.S. expeditionary force, was in headlong retreat. Finally, after desperate holding actions, the UNC force was able to stabilize the lines around the port of Pusan, through which reinforcements continued to arrive.

Once sufficient ground forces were in place, MacArthur was ready to act. Calling on his experience from the South Pacific, he decided on a bold move to reverse the UNC's fortunes. Over the objections of many in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he conceived a plan for an amphibious landing at Inchon, on the west coast of Korea just north of Seoul. It was an audacious and risky plan, because extreme tide variations in the landing area endangered the landing craft; and there was little prospect of surprising the defenders. Still, it offered the prospect of cutting off large North Korean forces, which could then be compelled either to retreat quickly, or to surrender. The landing was a stunning success. Pushing east from

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2553-54.

<sup>32</sup> Address at the Ceremonies Commemorating the 175th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1951, in *PPPUS, Truman*, p. 374.

Inchon, MacArthur's forces soundly defeated the North Korean army, which fled north to avoid encirclement. The UNC forces pursued, and soon regained the 38th parallel.

This raised a question of policy for Truman. It was now clearly within the military capability of the UNC forces to cross the 38th parallel, shatter the North Korean army, and seek to reunify the peninsula by force — hence expanding the political aims of the U.S. and the ROK to their unlimited state. Total victory beckoned; and, urged by Rhee and MacArthur to widen the war, Truman assented. The UNC forces were ordered into the north, where they captured the capital, Pyongyang, and continued to press the DPRK army. Strict limitations were imposed on the use of force: only ROK units could be used along the Yalu River, the border between the DPRK and Manchuria; under no circumstances would incursions across the Yalu be permitted; and, above all, operations were permitted only if there was no indication that Soviet or Chinese intervention was imminent.<sup>33</sup>

The problem was that the Chinese had, in fact, signaled their intention to intervene if UNC forces breached the 38th parallel. MacArthur, flush with triumph at Inchon, did not take these rumblings seriously. At a conference with Truman, at Wake Island on October 15, he argued that Chinese forces in Manchuria were few in number, since they were still occupied with consolidating the victory in the recent civil war.<sup>34</sup> Even when he began receiving reports of small-scale Chinese intervention at the front, he disregarded them.

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<sup>33</sup> Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 62-63.

<sup>34</sup> O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

In the latter part of October, over 300,000 Chinese troops, described by Beijing as “volunteers” (hence not officially under Beijing’s control), surprised UNC forces near the Yalu. Using an overwhelming advantage in manpower, they managed to overcome American superiority in firepower, naval and air power, and send MacArthur’s forces fleeing to the south, though in good order. By December UNC forces had been pushed below the 38th parallel, and Seoul had again fallen to communist forces. Exhultation turned to despair for the general. He ordered the bombing of the Yalu bridges to cut off Chinese supplies and reinforcements, and he demanded permission to widen the war to Manchuria, possibly including the use of nuclear weapons. Short of escalating, he asserted, UNC defeat was certain.

The Joint Chiefs countermanded MacArthur’s order regarding the Yalu bridges, and he was refused permission to expand the war. Nuclear weapons were out of the question, as the U.S. inventory was small and had to be conserved for the expected war in Germany. Moreover, direct Soviet intervention was not to be risked. Once the People’s Republic of China (PRC) entered the war, backed by the Soviet Union and with vast manpower reserves, the decision was clear: the UNC would revert back to the original, limited war aim of reestablishing the *status quo*, with the border once again fixed at the 38th parallel. Chinese intervention compelled a reversal of the decision to reunify the peninsula by force, and a return to more modest political objectives.

Thus ensued a curious episode in American civil-military relations. Flamboyant and charismatic, the victor over Japan, MacArthur was extraordinarily popular among the American people and their congressional representatives. Though ordered to desist, he

repeatedly launched stinging public attacks on the president's policy and strategy, both in the press and through letters to Congress. Tapping into a powerful undercurrent in American political culture, the general proclaimed that limited war was equivalent to appeasement. He demanded to "follow the conventional pattern of meeting maximum force with maximum counterforce as we have never failed to do in the past...we must win. There is no substitute for victory."<sup>35</sup> Victory, that is, of the kind achieved in 1945. This was not the Joint Chiefs' view: the JCS Chairman, General Omar Bradley, retorted in congressional hearings that widening the war "would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."<sup>36</sup> Truman was forced to wage a media war against his own commanding general.

In remarks to Congress later in the war, Acheson articulated the administration's policy: if the United States expanded the war, "there must be measured the risk of a general war with China, the risk of Soviet intervention,<sup>37</sup> and of World War III, as well as the probable effects upon the solidarity of the free world coalition."<sup>38</sup> This outlook governed American political and strategic calculations henceforth. Finally Truman had his fill of MacArthur's public defiance,<sup>39</sup> and he dismissed the general from command in April 1951. General Matthew B. Ridgway assumed command of the UNC forces. Though certainly correct in his decision to relieve MacArthur, at least in terms of civil-military

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas A. MacArthur, quoted in Brodie, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>36</sup> Omar Bradley, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>37</sup> The Soviets had threatened to intervene openly if the U.S. escalated, and Soviet pilots were known to have flown combat missions over the Korean peninsula.

<sup>38</sup> Statement by the Secretary of State, "Review of United States Policy in the Korean Conflict," June 1, 1951, *AFP*, p. 2618.

relations, the president's decision later had grave consequences for the solidity of public support for the war.

Ridgway proved his predecessor's analysis wrong. Under his direction, the UNC managed to stabilize the lines just south of the 38th parallel, and in January 1951 he launched Operation *Thunderbolt*, which regained the offensive for the United Nations. Despite initial successes, Chinese manpower proved no match for American technology. Seoul fell to UNC forces on March 15, and in April Ridgway's forces were threatening the 38th parallel once more. In May, Truman and the Joint Chiefs decided to limit severely UNC operations north of the border. This raised a critical issue: since UNC policy had now reverted to seeking restoration of the *status quo*<sup>40</sup> — and since circumspect signals were now emanating from Soviet diplomats on the desirability of peace<sup>41</sup> — should UNC forces breach the prewar border again, and press the offensive in order to speed a ceasefire?

Ridgway thought so. In his memoirs, he lamented the decision to stop "that proud Army in its tracks at the first sign that the Reds might be ready to sue for peace."<sup>42</sup>

Bernard Brodie, one of the foremost analysts of postwar U.S. policy and strategy, echoed Ridgway's sentiments:

the reason for continuing the extraordinarily successful enterprise that the U.N. offensive had become had nothing to do with the acquisition of more real estate. *Its purpose should have been to continue maximum pressure on the disintegrating Chinese*

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<sup>39</sup> In a democratic society, soldiers are expected to voice their opinions in private, but to support national policy and strategy publicly.

<sup>40</sup> O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 206.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew B. Ridgway, quoted in Brodie, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

*armies as a means of getting them not only to request but actually to conclude an armistice*<sup>43</sup> (emphasis added).

Analogies were drawn to 1918, when allied forces had kept up the military pressure on Germany until an armistice was actually signed. The theory was simple: provide the opponent with a simple choice, an armistice or total defeat. Many observers agreed that communist requests for an armistice were a device to gain a respite on the battlefield, and to move the contest to a more favorable arena — the negotiating table. Reluctant to risk Soviet intervention, and hoping to foster a positive climate for talks, American statesmen decided to halt Ridgway's forces at the 38th parallel. Both sides dug in, and in June 1951 the "military phase" of the Korean War ground to a halt. Henry Kissinger observed, laconically, "It was a classically American gesture. Because of their conviction that peace is normal and goodwill natural, American leaders have generally sought to encourage negotiations by removing elements of coercion and by unilateral demonstrations of goodwill."<sup>44</sup> Having "beaten" the mammoth Chinese army, Americans thought, the Chinese would naturally concede in the negotiating process.

#### PRENEGOTIATION SIGNALING AND MANEUVERS

As early as January 1951, the UN General Assembly had proposed a ceasefire, which the PRC had rejected out of hand, as "illegal" owing to lack of Chinese participation in drafting its provisions.<sup>45</sup> In late May, Soviet UN delegate Jacob Malik met privately with U.S. ambassador George F. Kennan and Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall to

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>44</sup> Kissinger, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

explore the possibility of an armistice. Based on these discussions, both American statesmen concluded that Mao would not seek peace except at Stalin's behest.<sup>46</sup> Shortly, statements appeared in the state-run Soviet press raising the possibility that socialism and capitalism could coexist; and on June 23, 1951, Malik spoke during a UN radio broadcast, declaring that "the Soviet peoples...believe that the most acute problem of the day — the problem of the armed conflict in Korea could...be settled," with the first step being discussions "for a cease-fire and an armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the Thirty-Eighth Parallel."<sup>47</sup> William Stueck remarked that, if "agreement merely to discuss and armistice entailed such preparation, agreement on its precise nature was bound to require considerable time and effort."<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, at the end of June Acheson estimated the chances for peace as "at least fifty-fifty."<sup>49</sup>

The immediate problem for the United States was how to respond to Malik's suggestion. The decision to negotiate carried significant propaganda implications for both sides. Openly requesting an armistice was anathema for communist leaders seeking to convert battlefield defeat into a political and propaganda victory. An American proposal for talks was bound to be trumpeted by the communist media as evidence of a defeated superpower suing for peace;<sup>50</sup> on the other hand, a public announcement of the UNC position on a ceasefire would be portrayed as Western resistance to a peace brokered by

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<sup>45</sup> *AFP*, pp. 2597-99. Throughout the Korean armistice negotiations, the PRC used every opportunity to seek entry to the UN, and to take over the Chinese seat in the Security Council, which was held by the Nationalist Chinese on Formosa.

<sup>46</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob Malik, quoted in *New York Times*, June 24, 1951, reprinted in *DAFR*, 1951, p. 437.

<sup>48</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>49</sup> Dean Acheson, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 210.

the peace-loving Soviet peoples. The UNC opted for the former, despite criticism from many who thought that the favorable military situation was discrediting communism. Over the radio, Ridgway transmitted an unencrypted query to communist forces, asking if they desired a ceasefire, and proposing meetings on board the Danish hospital ship *Jutlandia*; the terse reply ordered the UNC to come to Kaesong, near the 38th parallel, on July 10.<sup>51</sup> As predicted, the international press dutifully reported that the UNC had requested an armistice, since Ridgway had made the first overt proposal for a ceasefire.

The PRC had achieved a major propaganda success. The communist Chinese newspaper *Renmin ribao* editorialized that the Chinese people had always desired a peaceful settlement, but that “it was not until recently [that] severe blows to the American army [and] the general demands of the peoples of the world” had impelled Washington to “consider accepting the reasonable proposals of Malik.”<sup>52</sup> Kim’s government was more militant in its response, but also acceded, since it was totally dependent on the PRC and the USSR for its survival and had little bargaining leverage within the coalition. It was plausible for Mao to claim victory over America: China had entered the war when UNC forces were on the verge of overrunning North Korea, and it appeared to have fought the vaunted U.S. Army to a standstill since that time. By their patience, the communist powers had maneuvered the UNC into appearing to sue for peace.

At that point Acheson committed another major diplomatic blunder, by seeming to agree publicly not only that negotiations were desirable, but with Malik’s suggestion that

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>51</sup> C. Turner Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 4.

the 38th parallel be fixed as the armistice line.<sup>53</sup> The frontier straddled the parallel, but was slightly north of it to the east, and slightly south of it to the west (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1, Map of South Korea)

Communist statesmen seized on this, and it was to become the basis of their position in the protracted diplomatic haggling that followed. The UNC desired a ceasefire along the current line of contact, which would be far more defensible after the postwar withdrawal of UN forces. The lack of interagency coordination between the departments of State and Defense would complicate initial talks enormously, as the communists clung to Acheson's statement.

The UNC position entering the Kaesong negotiations was multifaceted. The negotiating team was instructed to pursue the following objectives:

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<sup>52</sup> U.S. Consulate General, Hong Kong, *Survey of the Mainland China Press*, 26-27 June, 1-3 July, 1951, in Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951*, Vol. 7: *Korea and China*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), pp. 599-600. (Hereafter *FR*, 1951)

- An end to the fighting, and assurances against its resumption;
- Restriction of the talks to purely military questions;
- Creation of a military armistice commission, with access to all of Korea, to supervise the implementation of an armistice;
- Cessation, by both sides, of sending reinforcements and materiel to Korea;
- A twenty-mile-wide demilitarized zone (DMZ), based on the current line of contact; and
- The expeditious exchange of prisoners of war (POWs) after an armistice.

Washington resisted demands from Rhee to press on militarily, to destroy the Pyongyang government and reunify the peninsula. To conciliate restless UN and NATO allies, U.S. negotiators were to be flexible wherever possible. American statesmen correctly anticipated communist resistance to the proposed armistice commission's access to the north, and to the current battle front as the line of demarcation.

The communists' initial position is more difficult to assess, owing to the closed nature of the Chinese and Soviet societies and the consequent unavailability of diplomatic records. The communist delegation's opening positions appeared to be, first, fixing the armistice line at the 38th parallel; and, second, the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea — in effect, a return to the military *status quo*, with American forces removed to a safe distance. On the broader issues, Stueck commented that it was

critical - for national pride, for the legitimacy at home of the PRC and the DPRK, and to maintain an image of strength abroad - to put the best possible face on the negotiating process, to accumulate all the symbols if not the concrete manifestations of victory, and, at all cost, to avert any implication of defeat. To the Communists, in short, *the negotiating process was war by other means*<sup>54</sup> (emphasis added).

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<sup>54</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

This was a neat reversal of classic strategic theory (discussed below), which holds that war is an extension of diplomacy by violent means. War and diplomacy mingled for those steeped in the doctrine of revolutionary war. The communist governments did agree to restrict the negotiations to purely military questions, with the understanding that wider issues pertaining to the Far East would be addressed at a political conference, to be held after the conclusion of an armistice.<sup>55</sup> The stage was set.

#### INITIAL ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS—KAESONG, JULY-AUGUST 1951

Acheson's confident prediction of imminent peace was soon disproved. The initial meetings were occupied mostly with communist posturing for the benefit of the international press, and with bargaining over the form an agenda should take. Truman's visible reluctance to resume the offensive encouraged stalling tactics, and allowed communist strategists to wrest away the initiative at the table. Admiral C. Turner Joy, whose polemical but enlightening book *How Communists Negotiate* provides most of the available first-hand accounts of the negotiating process, was the senior UNC delegate. The communist delegation was composed of General Nam Il of the DPRK and General Hsieh Fang of the PRC. Soviet representatives were conspicuously absent, though Stalin's influence was ever present. Nam was the titular head of the delegation, although Joy received the distinct impression that Hsieh was directing the communist team.<sup>56</sup> That seems reasonable, given the lopsided distribution of power between China and North Korea.

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<sup>55</sup> For example, the status of Formosa and the PRC's status in the UN.

The communists controlled the negotiating site. Though near the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and technically neutral, Kaesong was in communist-held territory in July 1951, and they put the physical surroundings to good use for propaganda purposes. Their efforts to embarrass the UNC delegation ranged from the brilliant to the absurd. In Chinese tradition, for instance, the northern side of the table is reserved for the victor and the southern side for the vanquished; Nam therefore ensured that Joy's team, oblivious to this nuance of Eastern culture, was seated to the south, a situation recorded by the communist press. They provided the hulking Admiral Joy with a chair several inches too short, so that he had to slouch, gazing up at the much shorter Nam. The communists responded to the presence of a small UN flag placed on the table by producing a taller DPRK flag, leading Joy to speculate wryly on whether the tallest flagpole in the world might soon be constructed.<sup>57</sup>

More substantial was the question of the agenda for negotiation. The communists insisted that their goals be incorporated into the agenda items, leading a frustrated Joy to exclaim, "They seek an agenda composed of *conclusions* favorable to their basic objectives."<sup>58</sup> For instance, one proposed item stipulated agreement on the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as the armistice line (vice agreement on *some* armistice line); another was for agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the peninsula. The UNC team, by contrast, adopted the Western approach emphasizing flexibility and concessions; they proposed to establish a line and discuss arrangements regarding foreign troops. It was obvious from the outset that settling the question of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was going to be laborious, as Nam demanded

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<sup>56</sup> Joy, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

that Malik's proposal and Acheson's apparent concurrence serve as the basis for an armistice. The communist delegation even stated at one point that the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was the only possible armistice line, since that was where the invasion had begun. The discussions would have been amusing, except that lives were being lost during the quibbling. The UNC view finally prevailed on the agenda after ten days of meetings, but Nam was able to insert the line-of-demarcation question at the top of the agenda, and insisted that the agenda items be settled sequentially. Clearly, the dispute over the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel had to be resolved before further progress was possible.<sup>59</sup> The UNC rewarded the communists' agreement on the agenda by halting military operations at the current front, a move Joy characterized as allowing them "to haggle and delay in respect to subsequent agenda items, free from the compulsion of impending military disaster."<sup>60</sup>

The communists staged several "incidents" at Kaesong in succeeding days, calculated to deliver negotiating or propaganda advantages. By holding firm on the agenda, and by "reneging" on the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, the UNC delegation had shattered the communist press's descriptions of a defeated superpower, cast in the role of supplicant at Kaesong.<sup>61</sup> Admiral Joy believed that the PRC and DPRK, consequently, needed to burnish the image of communist victory. A Chinese unit, for instance, deliberately marched through the neutral site, delaying the UNC delegation's arrival with a show of force. Joy declared, "It was necessary to paint in bold strokes the fact of communist

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

military dominance at Kaesong.”<sup>62</sup> When Ridgway suspended talks on July 12, demanding assurances of the site’s neutrality, the communists were forced to request resumption of talks. They shifted tactics: henceforth the “incidents” were uniformly designed to highlight UNC “brutality.” On August 19 a Chinese patrol was allegedly attacked; and on August 22 the communist delegation accused the UNC of launching an air raid on Kaesong in an attempt to murder Nam and Hsieh, a charge Joy denied heatedly. The evidence appeared to be clumsily fabricated, and was inconclusive at best.<sup>63</sup> A Chinese junior officer broke off negotiations on the spot. This unprecedented display of initiative by a communist officer fueled Joy’s suspicions that the entire event had been prearranged by Beijing and Pyongyang.

Why did the PRC and DPRK break off the talks so precipitously? A surprised Ridgway thought that the communists would be eager to prolong the respite on the battlefield which was afforded by negotiating. For his part, Joy indicated that the communists were furious over his exposure of their ploys such as the UN “air raid.”<sup>64</sup> Probably there is some truth in both statements. External events may have also played a role, as the Soviet Union hoped to derail U.S. efforts to reach a peace treaty with Japan and may have thought a cessation of talks in Korea would damage the U.S. position elsewhere. Additionally, Mao, the master of protracted war, did not believe that America would wage a long war in a secondary theater. A more uncompromising position, he calculated, might help to wring concessions from Washington. With renewed vigor, the communists applied

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<sup>62</sup> Joy, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

pressure with the military instrument after ending negotiations. In any case, Stueck observed, they “had overplayed their hand at Kaesong. Their belligerent tactics had solidified UNC determination not to accept the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as an armistice line and produced a break in the negotiations at a time when the military advantage rested with the enemy.”<sup>65</sup> The UNC intensified its air campaign over North Korea, waged artillery duels along the battle front, and bombarded communist positions from Navy battleships and cruisers. The military stalemate, however, remained.

### PANMUNJOM, OCTOBER 1951

Ironically, an actual UN air raid at Kaesong, in September 1951, prepared the ground for a new round of negotiations. The UNC apologized formally for the blunder,<sup>66</sup> thus allowing the PRC a face-saving device to return to the table. Once again, UNC operations were reduced in scope, in hopes of producing a collegial negotiating climate. Ridgway urged a tough U.S. position, marking a shift from July, when he had placated Joy by declaring the Nam and Hsieh were simply pursuing time-honored Eastern negotiating practices. He now argued for *not* fixing an armistice line so early in the negotiating process, since that would remove all military pressure from the communist delegation to reach an agreement.<sup>67</sup> Whatever the merits of this argument, and they are considerable, his pleas fell on deaf ears. After the controversy with MacArthur, U.S. leaders were far less inclined to heed recommendations from commanders in the field. Additionally, American

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>66</sup> *FR*, 1951, pp. 925-27, 929-30.

<sup>67</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-41.

statesmen were under pressure, internationally and from domestic public opinion, to show some flexibility.

The strategy worked. On October 25 the UNC presented a plan for a four-kilometer-wide DMZ generally following the current line of contact. Nam proposed some minor adjustments to the UNC formula. Meanwhile, President Truman escalated the propaganda war, proclaiming in a militant speech on September 17 that an agreement with communists was “not worth the paper it is printed on.”<sup>68</sup> On November 12 the UNC accepted the latest communist proposal on the demarcation line, on the condition that all additional agenda items be settled within thirty days.

Other issues proved to be surprisingly difficult to resolve, but the talks moved forward. The communist delegation sought once again to insert the issue of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea, but the UNC countered that this was a political question beyond the scope of the negotiations. The communists relented. As anticipated, the issue of access to all of Korea for an armistice monitoring commission proved to be a major sticking point; nevertheless, the PRC and DPRK consented to the principle. They made a counterproposal that a body composed of neutral nations supervise the armistice — “neutrality” being loosely defined, since Nam insisted that the Soviet Union be a participant in the commission. The UNC gave ground, and the negotiations moved to the details of implementation. For the moment the UNC was adamant in resisting the reconstruction of North Korean airfields, from which Soviet-built MiG-15 jet fighters could contest UNC air supremacy. Still, an overall agreement appeared to be within reach.

## PRISONERS OF WAR

The issue of POW exchanges, though, dashed hopes for an early settlement. The crux of the matter was that the communists, as a UN report later noted, insisted “that all prisoners of war must be repatriated, even if the use of force should be necessary to effect their return, and [the] United Nations [refused] to use force against such unwilling prisoners.”<sup>69</sup> Despite the 1949 Geneva Convention’s requirement for the expeditious return of all POWs after hostilities, the United States balked at such an “all for all” formula. First, there was a moral dimension, since many of the North Korean prisoners had been impressed into the DPRK army while it held most of South Korea. From a practical standpoint, the early release of POWs could alter the military balance, since there was a tremendous imbalance in the numbers of prisoners held by each side — on the order of ten to one in favor of the PRC and the DPRK.<sup>70</sup> There was also an enormous propaganda windfall at stake. China and North Korea could scarcely admit publicly that their citizens refused to return home, since that would highlight the gap between Marxist theory and the reality of life under communism. Truman’s advisers wove these considerations together as the doctrine of “no forced repatriation,” which would form the U.S. position for the duration of the Korean War.

Elections have a dramatic effect on presidential politics, and this was certainly true in 1952. The pressure to break the stalemate in Korea was intense. The allies were becoming restive, with a rift developing even between the United States and Great Britain,

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<sup>68</sup> *PPPUS, Truman*, pp. 520-23.

<sup>69</sup> Special Report of the United Nations Command to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, August 7, 1953, “Summary of the Armistice Negotiations, June 1951-July 1953,” *AFP*, p. 2627.

normally the closest of friends. A Soviet peace offensive in the UN portrayed America as unwilling to accept reasonable peace terms. At home things were little better. Public support had begun declining after the Chinese intervention and subsequent battlefield reverses, and it had plunged after Truman had fired the popular General MacArthur. As the 1952 campaign got underway, the president's popularity stood at an all-time low. He rightly feared the human and financial cost of renewing the ground offensive against thoroughly dug-in Chinese troops. His reluctance to take such a step left him open to Republican criticism as soft and indecisive with regard to communism. Once General Dwight D. Eisenhower, victor over Hitler, emerged as the Republican presidential nominee,<sup>71</sup> the attacks intensified.

Truman's need to appear resolute, combined with his personal convictions, solidified his position on forced repatriation; and he seized the issue as his own. He formally approved of the principle of no forced repatriation in early 1952, over the objections of General Ridgway, who correctly pointed out that this position probably meant longer prison terms for thousands of UNC soldiers. Still, Truman was reluctant to jeopardize the moral high ground differentiating the West from communism; in Acheson's words, "its continued defense represented an important demonstration of his country's moral superiority in the face of enemy intransigence."<sup>72</sup> The president's advisers settled on

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<sup>70</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 250. The communists listed 11, 559 UNC POWs, while the UNC held well over 100,000.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 256-59.

<sup>72</sup> Dean Acheson, quoted in John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Vol., XV: *Korea*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 44. (Hereafter *FR, 1952-1954*)

a “one for one” policy, under which each UNC prisoner would be exchanged for a communist counterpart.

The UNC incorporated this approach into its POW proposal of January 2, 1952.

This document suggested the following formula:

- POWs who elected repatriation would be exchanged, one for one, until one side had returned all such prisoners;
- Thereafter, the side which still held POWs would exchange them, one for one, for interned civilians who elected to be repatriated;
- All POWs not electing repatriation would be released upon promising not to bear arms in the conflict again;
- All remaining civilians in territory held by the other side would be repatriated if they so chose; and
- The International Committee of the Red Cross would be permitted to interview the POWs and civilians after the signing of an armistice, to determine who chose repatriation.

The UNC proposal pointed out that “your side has many times has asked the question, ‘What could be fairer than the release and repatriation of all prisoners of war following the armistice?’ Today, in the proposal, the UNC gives you the answer to that question.”<sup>73</sup>

The one-for-one approach was, in its pure form at least, a non-starter. The PRC and USSR responded to it with vitriolic “hate America” campaigns in the state-controlled media, and they accused the UNC of waging biological warfare against communist forces. Nonetheless, the two sides made progress in other areas, with the UNC giving way on rehabilitation of airfields and the PRC relenting from its insistence on Soviet membership

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<sup>73</sup> Proposal by the United Nations Command, “Exchange of Prisoners of War,” January 2, 1952, *AFP*, pp. 2642-43.

on the neutral nations supervisory commission. Joy and his negotiators had an effective wedge to use in the POW discussions: the communist delegation had previously claimed to have released thousands of UNC POWs near the front, in order to account for inflated numbers they had broadcast during the early fighting. They could hardly oppose the UNC applying their own logic, and implementing some form of voluntary repatriations scheme. Preparations commenced for screening communist POWs to determine who would resist repatriation; the UNC delegation provided Nam Il with an estimate that 116,000 of 132,000 prisoners would accept repatriation, a figure which seemed satisfactory. Additionally, the communists accepted a new UNC formula providing for reclassifying South Koreans pressed into the DPRK army as civilians, before a one-for-one exchange. The only restriction was that the PRC insisted that *all* Chinese prisoners be returned to the PRC. The communists and the UNC were willing to make concessions on other issues, if only a deal could be struck on the exchange of POWs. "Both sides," Stueck remarked, "clearly wanted an end to the fighting. The depth of animosity and suspicion between the two sides, however, grounded so deeply in culture, ideology, and historical circumstance, kept the prospects for early accommodation very much in doubt."<sup>74</sup> The screening process commenced in early April.

Concerned over the ramifications of screening, Kim's regime had infiltrated agents into the South Korean POW camps. These individuals intentionally allowed themselves to be captured on the battlefield, and once in the camps they organized what Joy described as miniature totalitarian states responsive to Pyongyang. This was a new approach to the

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<sup>74</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

problem of applying pressure on the UNC, as the prison leaders orchestrated frequent riots designed to provoke the South Korean guards, thereby highlighting UNC “brutality” for the international press.<sup>75</sup> Nam Il berated Joy, alleging UNC disregard for the Geneva Convention and declaring, “the iron-clad fact is that your side has carried out violence against our captured personnel and pushed through your so-called screening by force in an attempt to retain forcibly our captured personnel as your cannon fodder.”<sup>76</sup> The rhetorical offensive was designed to discredit the principle of voluntary repatriation and compel concessions by the UNC.

An unexpected turn of events soon left the UNC in the odd position of trying to maximize the number of prisoners repatriated. The screening of POWs revealed that 74,000 of 132,000 POWs would resist repatriation, over four times the original estimate of 16,000 provided to Nam. This fantastic number prompted Joy to recommend rescreening, to verify that coercion had not been involved. Ridgway eventually recommended against rescreening, on grounds that it was infeasible. He requested and received permission to offer concessions on other issues in order to placate the communists, who would, understandably, be outraged. The UNC delegation committed a major blunder on April 19 by presenting the numbers to Nam’s team publicly. Joy had unwittingly dealt the communists a severe propaganda blow. Nam backed away from earlier concessions, and declared that the only individuals to be exempt from repatriation would be those whose homes were in UNC-controlled territory. “The UNC,” after this ugly confrontation, “now

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<sup>75</sup> Joy, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-54.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

lost all hope for an early settlement."<sup>77</sup> Since neither side seemed willing to make concessions on the POW issue, and neither side seemed willing to bear the cost of a new offensive, diplomatic and military stalemate was the result. Ridgway was reduced to cursing the "treacherous savages"<sup>78</sup> in Beijing, Moscow and Pyongyang.

#### DEADLOCK AND SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS

The deadlock persisted for the remainder of 1952, punctuated now and again by desultory fighting. For various reasons, both sides now needed an end to hostilities, and each side now cast about for ways to apply sufficient pressure to move the other.

Domestic and international pressure increasingly came to bear on Truman, and communist intransigence grew correspondingly. Rhee's government, always repressive, implemented martial law, leading some to question why the United States was defending the ROK. There was unrest among the NATO allies, and the Soviet Union openly courted the nonaligned nations. The formerly automatic U.S. voting majority in the General Assembly dwindled. Massive labor strikes in the steel industry, POW riots in Korea, and unrelenting criticism from Eisenhower and critics in the press convinced Truman to decline to seek another term. Despite his political weakness, the president issued a three-point proposal on May 7, providing that (1) there would be no forced repatriations; (2) the UNC would not insist on prohibiting airfield rehabilitation; and (3) the neutral nations supervisory commission would consist of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden and

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<sup>77</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-69.

<sup>78</sup> Matthew B. Ridgway, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 271.

Switzerland (two nations chosen by each side).<sup>79</sup> The communists were receptive to items 2 and 3, but rebuffed the UNC's demand in item 1. The deadlock remained intact.

General Mark Clark succeeded Ridgway in May, and proved to be far more militant than his predecessor. Around the same time, General William K. Harrison, Jr. replaced Joy as the chief UNC delegate at Panmunjom, bringing a no-nonsense attitude to the table. The impending elections, and the approach of the fall General Assembly session, ruled out a major military initiative. Still, Clark stepped up the UNC's air campaign against North Korean infrastructure, particularly dams and power stations; and he requested and received permission to expand the ROK army to 16 divisions. The pressure was inadequate. "The problem," as Stueck noted, "rested not in the Communists' unwillingness to bargain while under military pressure, but in the fact that the pressure applied was insufficient to persuade the Communists that concessions were necessary on an issue of considerable importance."<sup>80</sup> Peripheral military jabs did not translate into decisive negotiating leverage.

Stalin's influence began to be felt at Panmunjom in mid-1952. Firmness was necessary in order to widen rifts among the Western allies. For him, peace would be a means of slowing the buildup of U.S. and Western military strength, especially the move to rearm West Germany within NATO; and for securing a relaxation of the Western economic embargo against the communist world. Discreet signals of moderation began to emanate from Moscow through diplomats and the state press; and in October Stalin

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<sup>79</sup> Statement by the President, "Three-Point Proposal for an Armistice Submitted by the United Nations Command," May 7, 1952, *AFP*, pp. 2644-45.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

published his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, which stated explicitly, for the first time, that socialism and capitalism might coexist, and that the Soviet Union had no desire to attack the West. “[T]he capitalists,” he declared, “although for propaganda purposes they raise a hubbub about the aggressive nature of the Soviet Union, do not themselves believe in its aggressive nature, since they take into account the peaceful policy of the Soviet Union *and know that the Soviet Union will not itself attack the capitalist countries*”<sup>81</sup> (emphasis added). Hidden among the usual tough rhetoric were hints at a desire for accommodation. Stalin began to nudge the communist Chinese toward an armistice.

Too much should not be made of this. In mid-1952 there was no particular urgency to Stalin’s and Mao’s attempts to end the war, and they were essentially of one mind on policy matters. Having fought the world’s strongest nation to a standstill, the Chinese were content to enjoy a tremendous boost in prestige. They and their Soviet sponsors were encouraged by the travails of President Truman, and saw no reason to offer concessions: “as so often before, they counted on the United States being unable, for political reasons, to mobilize the vast material resources at its disposal so as to prevail in Korea.”<sup>82</sup>

American patience began to wear thin. General Harrison issued a blunt statement on September 28: “I have an important statement to make. ... It must be now be clear to you that one of the requirements of our side which cannot be compromised is that of no

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<sup>81</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, in Clarence W. Baier and Richard P. Stebbins, ed., *Documents on American Foreign Relations*, Vol. XII, *January 1, 1952 - December 31, 1952*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 108.

<sup>82</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

forced repatriation.”<sup>83</sup> He outlined three alternative proposals for the communists’ consideration: first, the one-for-one exchange (described above); second, a provision for transporting those who resisted repatriation to a neutral country for a probationary period in which the home country would be allowed to try to persuade them to accept repatriation; and third, movement of POWs to sites in the DMZ, where they would be released to the side of their choice.<sup>84</sup> He then called for a ten-day recess for consultations. When the communists refused all three proposals, Harrison suspended the negotiations indefinitely. Announcing the suspension, Acheson stated, “The duration of the recess is entirely up to the Communists.”<sup>85</sup> The negotiations did not resume until April 26, 1953.

#### **BREAKTHROUGH AND ENDGAME**

As the fall of 1952 wore on, the balance of negotiating power began to tilt toward the United States and the UNC. For political purposes and from genuine conviction, Dwight D. Eisenhower’s campaign rhetoric took on a brusque note; and he backed his words with several actions which alarmed Soviet, Chinese and North Korean observers. It seems probable that Eisenhower’s promises to end the war, buttressed by his undoubted credentials as a war leader, propelled him into office.

His public pronouncements during the presidential campaign were largely calculated to damage his Democratic opponent, but communist analysts seemed to believe that they were sincerely meant. Eisenhower pledged to correct the prevailing

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<sup>83</sup> Statement by the Chief United Nations Command Negotiator at Panmunjom, “Proposal for a Solution of the Prisoner of War Problem,” September 28, 1952, *AFP*, pp. 2647-48.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2648-49.

<sup>85</sup> Statement by the Secretary of State, “Suspension of the Armistice Negotiations,” October 8, 1952, *AFP*, pp. 2649-50.

“malfeasance in office, disregard for financial responsibility,” and so forth, and for its timidity in Korea, as reducing “the prestige of the United States and [causing] disillusionment and cynicism among our people.”<sup>86</sup> He well understood the link between military strength and economic health, and was determined to end the war and reduce defense expenditures.

Eisenhower called for increased reliance on nuclear weapons as the centerpiece of American military strategy, which later culminated in the New Look strategy. This undoubtedly increased his credibility when he implied willingness to escalate the war. After the November elections, President-elect Eisenhower traveled to Korea to observe conditions at the front. He was impressed with the strength of Chinese defenses, and was concerned with the possibility of a general war if the UNC risked new offensive operations:

It was obvious that any frontal attack would present great difficulties. ...it had been tacitly accepted by both sides...that we were fighting defensively and would take no risks of turning the conflict into a global war, which many feared would occur should we undertake offensive operations on a scale sufficient to win a decisive victory.<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, he concluded that “if these [negotiations] were not completed successfully within a reasonable time, our only recourse would be to mount an all-out attack regardless of the risks.”<sup>88</sup> He met with General MacArthur, an outspoken advocate of a total-war strategy, to hear his views on how to achieve an armistice; a meeting gauged for maximum impact in Moscow and Beijing. Eisenhower reluctantly concluded that the Korean War had

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<sup>86</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1963), p. 83.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

to be brought to an end, diplomatically or militarily, so that the United States could turn its attention to the larger Cold War.

After his inauguration, President Eisenhower took swift action to apply additional pressure on Mao. He escalated the rhetorical war during his first State of the Union Address, on February 2, 1953, in which he sketched his policy for Korea and the Cold War. The president linked the war in Korea to communist designs in Indochina and Formosa; and he denounced the communists' resistance to a recent General Assembly resolution calling for an early settlement.<sup>89</sup> He announced that the Seventh Fleet would be withdrawn from the Taiwan Straits, where it had been guarding against a renewal of the Chinese Civil War since 1949; henceforth, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces on Formosa would be able to threaten the PRC on a new front. Eisenhower created a sense of urgency in describing the economic imperative:

Our problem is to achieve adequate military strength within the limits of endurable strain on our economy. To amass military power without regard to our economic capacity would be to defend ourselves against one kind of disaster by inviting another.<sup>90</sup>

Skillfully created was the image of a new president, under intense pressure to end "Mr. Truman's War" and restore peace and prosperity. It undoubtedly was meant not only for domestic, but for international consumption, to be scrutinized in allied and enemy capitals alike.

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<sup>89</sup> Resolution 610 (VII) of the United Nations General Assembly, "Proposals for a Solution of the Prisoner of War Problem," December 3, 1952, *AFP*, pp. 2651-54.

<sup>90</sup> Message of the President to the Congress on the State of the Union, "The Principles of American Foreign Policy," February 2, 1953, in Peter V. Curl, ed., *Documents on American Foreign Relations*, Vol. XII, *January 1, 1953 - December 31, 1953*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 23.

Fortune assisted Eisenhower's cause. The communist bloc was rocked on March 5, 1953, when Joseph Stalin was found dead in his suburban home in Kuntsevo. This event kindled an intense succession struggle in Moscow and injected a new dynamic into the Korea negotiations. Western observers speculated on the effects on communist policy and strategy. Some thought that a more militant Soviet leadership cadre would emerge, replacing a Stalin who had become increasingly cautious and, according to his daughter, gripped by persecution mania in his later years.<sup>91</sup> The actual results were far less apocalyptic, with the interim leadership opting to continue Stalin's peace offensive. Their public statements were relatively conciliatory, and the stalemate on Korea began to ease. On April 11 the two sides reached an agreement to exchange wounded and sick POWs,<sup>92</sup> an important step toward resuming plenary sessions. Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai proposed new negotiations in the wake of the new agreement, and meetings at Panmunjom resumed on April 26.

The UNC planned to continue its militant stance in hopes of speeding an armistice. Harrison rejected a communist proposal for indefinite confinement of POWs in a neutral country, admonishing his counterpart that "we do not intend to become involved in protracted and useless arguments."<sup>93</sup> At subsequent meetings Nam Il displayed more flexibility, but when he balked at a new UNC proposal, Harrison reminded him publicly that time was "fast running out."<sup>94</sup> American officials predicted the release of POWs

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<sup>91</sup> Svetlana Stalin, quoted in Taubman, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>92</sup> Agreement between the United Nations Command and the North Korean and Chinese Communist Commands, "Repatriation of Sick and Injured Captured Personnel," April 11, 1953, *AFP*, pp. 2655-58.

<sup>93</sup> William K. Harrison, quoted in Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

willing to fight the communists. The United States debated a new offensive, with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles urging Eisenhower to demonstrate “our clear superiority by giving the Chinese one hell of a licking.”<sup>95</sup> Still, the president hoped to settle the conflict at the bargaining table without a costly new offensive. He hoped not to have to make good on the veiled threats he had directed at the communists.

Meanwhile, allied unrest at the UN, combined with the ongoing Soviet peace offensive, demanded a vigorous diplomatic riposte. Stung by Soviet editorials denouncing American intransigence and brutality, Eisenhower delivered a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 16, in which he responded to the charges. “This is one of those times in the affairs of nations,” he asserted, “when the gravest choices must be made, if there is to be a turning toward a just and lasting peace...*is there no other way the world may live?*”<sup>96</sup> Now, he said, turning his attention to the struggle in the Kremlin, “a new leadership has assumed power in the Soviet Union. Its links to the past, however strong, cannot bind it completely. Its future is, in great part, its own to make.”<sup>97</sup> The president concluded by reminding Soviet leaders that they would face a united Free World in any future aggression.

The pressure on Eisenhower mounted. The rift widened with Churchill’s government, when the great man suggested that Eisenhower accept the latest communist proposal, of May 7, for abandoning the neutral nations formula in favor of a five-nation

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<sup>95</sup> John F. Dulles, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>96</sup> Address “The Chance for Peace” Delivered before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 16, 1953, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 50.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

repatriation commission. There was even unrest within the right wing of his own Republican Party, which agitated for a tough stance. The European allies, for their part, increasingly feared the ignition of a general war with the USSR. Meanwhile, the always volatile Rhee began beating the drum once again for reunification of the peninsula under Seoul's leadership. He demanded that the United States seek (1) reunification; (2) the withdrawal of Chinese forces; (3) the disarmament of North Korean forces; (4) the prevention of third-party arms shipments to North Korea; and (5) declaration of the ROK's sovereignty over all of Korea.<sup>98</sup> Dulles replied that the United States fully supported Rhee's goals, but did not feel itself obligated to seek them by force. This pressure culminated in a confrontation with the communist delegation on May 13, when the UNC proposed the automatic release of all POWs within the retaining sides' territory. Nam, furious, scorned the new proposal and declared that the May 7 concessions were the final ones the PRC and DPRK were willing to make.<sup>99</sup>

The communists, it appeared, had reached their final negotiating position, and it now fell to the Eisenhower administration to craft its own final position. Support was declining domestically and internationally, and the Eighth Army faced the prospect of high costs on the battlefield in a new offensive, possibly complicated by direct Soviet intervention. After lengthy debate in the national-security community, Eisenhower instructed Harrison to offer the communists four concessions, most notably the abandonment of attempts to prohibit airfield rehabilitation; and he made a preliminary

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<sup>98</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, pp. 316-17.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.

offer to Rhee of a U.S.-ROK mutual-security pact and an expansion of the ROK army to 20 divisions. On May 25 the president instructed the Panmunjom delegation not to issue a public ultimatum, but to make perfectly clear that this was the UNC's final negotiating position. Clearly implied was that the matter would be settled on the battlefield should the latest proposal be rejected.<sup>100</sup>

The communists pondered the UNC's proposal from May 25 to June 17, 1953. They considered a new offensive to settle the matter, but concluded that they could not overcome the UNC preponderance of firepower. Nevertheless, they did launch a limited effort which adjusted the armistice line slightly in their favor prior to delineation of the final armistice line on June 17. Most importantly, the communist delegation conceded the POW issue, perhaps reasoning that it was a propaganda loss in any case, and that prolonging it caused them to appear desperate and powerless.<sup>101</sup> In essence, the UNC's final proposal prevailed, with minor adjustments to the armistice line.

Why did the communists give in, after standing firm for so long? Any answer will be clouded by guesswork, owing to the closed nature of the Soviet, Chinese and North Korean societies.<sup>102</sup> Historians today postulate that UNC pressure, combined with internal dynamics on the communist side, ultimately proved decisive. That seems a reasonable assessment. Clearly, Mao and Stalin had been convinced that the Eisenhower administration was unwilling to tolerate continuing stalemate, at the table or on the battlefield, and that it was prepared to expand the war to Manchuria, and possibly to the

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 320-25.

<sup>101</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-25.

<sup>102</sup> Though the Soviet archives have been opened and are now being sifted through.

nuclear level. Public statements and private diplomatic communications made this point forcefully.<sup>103</sup> The removal of the Seventh Fleet from its blocking position near Taiwan was worrisome for Mao, since it raised the possibility of a second front in the war. The stepped-up UNC air campaign, buttressed by virtually undisputed U.S. air supremacy, was beginning to tell. Once the American economy had fully geared up for war production, the U.S. nuclear arsenal had grown to a point where scarcity was not an issue. Eisenhower, they realized, was no longer bound to conserve warheads to turn back a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. The ROK army's expansion introduced a new element into their calculus, with the prospect of the DPRK being at a military disadvantage after the war. In short, "if the UNC broke off negotiations at Panmunjom and began a process of gradual military escalation, the Communists would face a choice between continuing an expensive war that they were unlikely to win or making concessions under possibly humiliating conditions."<sup>104</sup> This unpalatable choice they were unwilling to make. Pressure on the United States propelled it toward escalation, while pressure on the communists forced them to concede in Korea.

Domestic and international policy were intertwined in Moscow and Beijing, possibly to as great an extent as they were in Washington and Seoul. The ongoing succession struggle in Moscow had to be resolved, diverting Soviet attention from the Korean War. Economic conditions were deteriorating throughout the communist bloc, as feeble economies struggled to produce sufficient war materiel to supply the Chinese

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<sup>103</sup> For instance, Prime Minister Nehru of India had been cued in that the administration soon intended to widen the conflict, in hopes that he would pass along the signal to Moscow and Beijing.

<sup>104</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

expeditionary forces. This was a direct threat to the survival of the communist revolution, and unrest threatened in Eastern Europe.<sup>105</sup> Hence domestic considerations generated pressure to staunch the outflow of goods to Korea, resulting in turn in Soviet use of economic leverage to convince the PRC to reach a settlement. Thus internal conditions united with UNC pressure to produce an agreement, before similar pressures on the U.S. side forced Eisenhower's hand.

"All hell broke loose, by Rhee's order,"<sup>106</sup> reported General Clark on June 18. President Rhee, seeking to avert what he regarded as a disastrous defeat, had sought to derail the armistice, announcing, "I have ordered on my own responsibility the release of the anti-communist Korean prisoners," numbering some twenty-seven thousand.<sup>107</sup> An emotional and unpredictable individual, he remained adamant in his pursuit of a united Korea, and felt, justifiably, that he had been reduced to a minor position in the UNC's deliberations. The American policy community was forced to scramble to rescue the armistice on the eve of its conclusion. The communists had to be placated, and Rhee had to be brought in line. The UNC quietly developed Plan *Everready* for UNC seizure of the ROK government, in case relations worsened. Assurances were provided to Nam, who had demanded to know whether the ROK would abide by the armistice terms. The communists, not surprisingly, reaped maximum propaganda benefits from the incident, suspending negotiations and launching scathing attacks on Rhee in the press. Clark sent a stern rebuke to Rhee, alleging that he had carried out his POW scheme using ROK troops

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<sup>105</sup> Violence erupted in East Berlin in 1953, for example.

<sup>106</sup> Mark Clark, quoted in Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

<sup>107</sup> *AFP*, p. 2635.

assigned to the UNC.<sup>108</sup> Hastily Eisenhower dispatched a letter to his volatile ally, pledging political support but reminding him that “we do not intend to employ war as an instrument to accomplish the worldwide political settlements to which we are dedicated and which we believe to be just...[and] as a personal friend I urge that your country not embark” on a course of violence as Pyongyang had done in 1950.<sup>109</sup> He proposed a mutual-security pact of the kind long sought by Rhee, as well as the expansion of the ROK army to 20 divisions with American support. A shrewd politician, Rhee had correctly gauged that his American allies would not abandon him after three years of warfare, and he used this knowledge to wring maximum concessions from them.

The communists’ reaction to all this was relatively mild, and talks resumed at Panmunjom on July 10. They accepted Harrison’s assurances that South Korea would comply with the armistice, and on July 27, fittingly, the Korean War came to an end in a frosty atmosphere, with the delegates neither looking at nor speaking to one another during the signing ceremony at Panmunjom. The sixteen UN member states which had contributed forces to the Korean conflict ratified the armistice at Washington that same day.<sup>110</sup>

#### THEORY OF WAR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NEGOTIATION

Carl von Clausewitz maintained that war was an extension of politics by violent means. War aimed to achieve political objectives; hence the war effort in all its dimensions

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<sup>108</sup> Letter from the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, to the President of the Republic of Korea, June 20, 1953, *AFP*, pp. 2659-60.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from the President of the United States (Eisenhower) to the President of the Republic of Korea (Rhee), June 6, 1953, *DAFR*, 1953, pp. 303-305.

<sup>110</sup> Sixteen-Nation Declaration on Korea Issued at Washington, July 27, 1953, *AFP*, p. 2662.

should remain under political dominance. There was no such thing as “purely military” affairs independent of politics. All tools of national power must be meshed together in a coherent whole. Single-minded reliance on brute force was potentially disastrous. A central theme in Clausewitz’s *On War* that was important in Korea was that of the “trinity of war”: the people, the government and the armed forces, all of which must be wielded effectively to produce ultimate success. Communist strategists recognized that America’s weak link was the people’s support for the war, and tailored their military strategy and propaganda offensives accordingly, portraying themselves as conciliatory or militant, as necessary. Clausewitz drew a distinction between limited war and unlimited, or total, war. Total war would be waged with all the tools at a country’s disposal and generally aimed at the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces, his political existence, or both. Limited war, in contrast, aimed at lesser objectives, and limitations were generally imposed on the use of military force. Korea was a limited war for the most part, except for the fall of 1950, when the UNC temporarily sought to reunify the peninsula by destroying the DPRK. Chinese intervention forced a return to limited war. Military means were limited throughout the war, since nuclear weapons were never used and the geographic scope of UNC operations was never extended to the PRC proper. Essentially Eisenhower threatened to wage war with unlimited means and ends if the communists continued to resist an armistice. Perhaps a better grasp of Clausewitz by U.S. soldiers and statesmen may have helped to speed an armistice.

It is uncertain whether Mao Tse-Tung was a disciple of Clausewitz, but his *Military Writings* are undeniably Clausewitzian in outlook. To prevail over a materially superior

foe from the industrialized West, he emphasized, the weaker state or movement had to use all the elements of power — political mobilization of the people, diplomacy and economics, as well as military — to prolong the war and undermine the stronger side's will to fight. Nationalism, once aroused, would allow the weaker power to emerge victorious. He scorned "the so-called theory that 'weapons decide everything.'"<sup>111</sup> The Western power, Mao assumed, would be less committed to a limited effort, and the popular-support pillar of the trinity of war would be vulnerable to attack. Persistence and unswerving commitment were the keys to victory. This did not prove to be a problem in most cases, since the war was waged on Asian soil and the people could easily be motivated to fight foreign interlopers. "Weapons are an important factor in war," he concluded, "but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale."<sup>112</sup> Totalitarian societies are well suited to such continuous political mobilization, as Hannah Arendt has observed,<sup>113</sup> while public support tends to be an Achilles' heel for democracies. His theories were embraced by revolutionaries throughout the communist bloc, and the history of warfare since 1945 seems to vindicate Mao's writings.

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<sup>111</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Protracted War," in *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung*, (Beijing, 1963), p. 217.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>113</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975).

## POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CULTURE: UNITED STATES

*"You know," [the American officer] boasted to a North Vietnamese colonel after the war, "you never defeated us on the battlefield." To which the Communist officer replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."*<sup>114</sup>

That encounter, after another, even more painful experience in Asia, epitomizes the dilemma Americans have faced since 1945. Statesmen and soldiers sought to reconcile their political culture, steeped in total victory over Nazism and militarism, with the disappointing reality of limited war. American arms have been dominant in the postwar era, as indeed they were in Korea. What has been lacking is the ability to translate battlefield dominance into strategic and, above all, political success. In Korea, policy-makers and strategists had to grapple with a foe who, since he could not be defeated militarily for political reasons, had to be persuaded to accept defeat. As we have seen, that proved to be a tall order.

Culture can be a powerful barrier to negotiation, particularly when the passions of combat have been aroused. That was true for both sides in the Cold War. In *The Arrogance of Power*, Senator J. William Fulbright offered a succinct analysis of the two sides of America's collective personality: "Both are characterized by a kind of moralism, but one is the morality of decent instincts tempered by the knowledge of human imperfection and the other is the morality of absolute self-assurance fired by the crusading spirit."<sup>115</sup> These intellectual currents have contended for supremacy throughout American history, but the latter has been ascendant in the twentieth century. After two world wars and a meteoric

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<sup>114</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 2nd ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 19.

<sup>115</sup> J. William Fulbright, quoted in MacDougall, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

rise to superpower status, the urge to export democracy was strong indeed. The “lessons” of the 1930s remained strong, especially the injunction against appeasing dictators, which was cited repeatedly during the Korean conflict. Once communism had become equated with Nazism — and there were grounds for making such a connection — the messianic nature of American democracy came to dominate foreign policy. Under such circumstances it was extraordinarily difficult to make any concessions to communists. The pattern certainly held true in Korea.

The American way of war is crusade, carried out John Wayne-style: the people’s enthusiasm should be roused to fever pitch, the opponent should be confronted head-on and routed, preferably quickly and painlessly, and terms should be dictated at the table after complete military victory. Truman tried to have it both ways: using the absolute rhetoric common in wartime, he portrayed the Korean War as a war to defend civilization against absolute tyranny: “The Communists in the Kremlin are engaged in a monstrous conspiracy to stamp out freedom all over the world. If they were to succeed, the United States would be numbered among their principal victims.”<sup>116</sup> The Soviet Union was working, he stated, through proxies in Beijing and Pyongyang. For a time Truman succumbed to the lure of total victory, by ordering MacArthur’s forces to reunify the peninsula by force. Ultimately, though, the reality of limited war shattered his grandiose rhetoric. Having roused the American people for a grand crusade, disappointment inevitably accompanied a limited war which did not promise the satisfaction of total

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<sup>116</sup> Radio Report to the American People on Korea and on U.S. Policy in the Far East, April 11, 1951, *PPPUS, Truman*, p. 223.

victory; and popular support for the war waned. Expending blood and treasure to restore a *status quo*, and negotiating with dictators “engaged in a monstrous conspiracy,” are disappointing ways to wage crusades. That is the dilemma of limited war in a democracy.

In such a political and strategic culture, the links between diplomatic, military and economic power have often been severed. War and diplomacy are considered to be separate things, with soldiers prosecuting the war effort independent of its political ramifications. Diplomacy and negotiation halt at the outbreak of hostilities, and resume after the guns are again silent. Politicians, in this view, should remain in their own sphere of diplomacy, and refrain from meddling in “purely military” matters. General MacArthur’s insistence that “there is no substitute for victory,” issued after his dismissal in Korea, is a perfect illustration of this. That is a clear violation of the Clausewitzian principle of political dominance over military strategy. Like many of his countrymen, MacArthur never fathomed the relationship of national policy to military strategy; that “victory” may be irrelevant to political success. Undercurrents in the American character propel all wars toward the total state, as attested to by calls to widen the war to the Chinese mainland and to employ nuclear weapons. Truman yielded to this temptation in late 1950, when he was persuaded to authorize a campaign to destroy the DPRK; in essence he allowed military strategy to gain ascendancy over UNC policy, turning Clausewitz’s policy-strategy relationship on its head. He sought to break a diplomatic impasse by violent means. Americans, in short, have found it difficult to integrate diplomacy and military campaigns. This was apparent in Korea, where negotiation and war were considered parallel, but independent, phenomena.

## POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CULTURE: PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND SOVIET UNION

Communist statesmen and strategists, by contrast, were remarkably adept at integrating diplomacy and violence, the hallmark of the successful war effort. Harnessing the strategic theories of Clausewitz and Mao, communist statesmen meshed all the elements of national power into a cohesive war effort designed to protract the war and undermine the United States' trinity of war. John Keegan has described war as a cultural act.<sup>117</sup> If that is so, history may help to explain the Chinese and Russian ways of war. Both nations were characterized by extraordinary resilience and a willingness to make sacrifices of enormous magnitude. This explains Mao's blithe, but accurate, assumption that Easterners would display a superior level of commitment in a conflict with an industrialized power. Moreover, both nations have suffered at the hands of the Western powers, and of their industrialized Asian neighbors. Chinese history has been marked by exploitation since the nineteenth century, yielding a strong desire to "break out from its old weakness and poverty and take a place among the nations more in keeping with its vast population and considerable natural resources."<sup>118</sup> Chinese history, with its proud traditions, has bred patience in the nation's inhabitants, and the art of thinking in the long view. Its inferior material position — as "the weaker power" — required a strategy like Mao's, which he developed in the context of the prolonged war against Imperial Japan,<sup>119</sup> and had applied in the recent war against Chiang Kai-shek.

Russian history is a litany of invasion, resistance, and sacrifice on a level nearly

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<sup>117</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 1-60.

<sup>118</sup> *The Economist* (London), February 25, 1950, *AFP*, p. 2466.

<sup>119</sup> "On Protracted War" was written in 1938, during the war in Manchuria.

unfathomable for Westerners. The legacy of Napoleon's 1812 campaign, and the still-fresh memories of the Second World War may have been instructive for U.S. policy-makers and negotiators. In 1812 Napoleon marched to Moscow and occupied it, only to find to his amazement that the Tsar did not agree that he had been defeated. Napoleon went on to suffer one of the worst defeats in history. Russians are nothing if not resilient and patient. Hitler learned the same lesson, painfully, when the Soviet Union suffered 20 million casualties but emerged victorious. The proud Chinese civilization was similarly unlikely to admit defeat easily. Perseverance in the face of superior material power was a prominent feature of Chinese and Russian culture. Kennan had advised matching Eastern patience with a strategy of patient firmness. American leaders could not reasonably conclude that, since they had the upper hand on the battlefield in Korea, negotiating success was certain to follow.

### IDEOLOGY

Closely related to the discussion of culture is the impact of ideology on negotiation. Individuals reflect their national ideology imperfectly, as indeed they do with their culture. Still, a knowledge of ideology is a useful guidepost for the negotiator. As Salacuse has written, ideology generates adversarial relations at the table; it leads to overblown rhetoric which blocks collegiality and the search for creative solutions; and, above all, it promotes hard and fast positions.<sup>120</sup> In classical Greece, Thucydides, chronicler of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, wrote extensively on the nature of a regime and its

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<sup>120</sup> Jeswald W. Salacuse, "Ducking Ideologies," *Making Global Deals: What Every Executive Should Know about Negotiating Abroad*, (New York: Times Books, 1991), pp. 74-75.

impact on diplomacy. Over the course of this 27-year war, he asserted, Athenian democracy degenerated from an ideal form into a more totalitarian form, with a consequent decline in ethics. The Athenians initially dispatched a fleet to annihilate Mytilene, a small state resisting Athenian dominance, but thought better of it after an impassioned debate. A decade later, Athens issued an ultimatum to another state, Melos, under similar circumstances, but this time slaughtered the inhabitants when they refused. Thucydides portrays the Mytilene incident as Athenian democracy at its zenith, with Melos as its nadir. The lesson is clear: the nature of a regime — its ideology — governs not only its conduct toward its citizens, but in the international arena. Totalitarian systems were held to be more inclined to callous conduct in diplomacy and war than their democratic counterparts. Hannah Arendt, who wrote extensively about the need of totalitarian systems for enemies and a continuous sense of revolution, refined this theory.<sup>121</sup> Thucydides's lessons, over two millennia old, are relevant to the present study of the Korean War, as are Arendt's and Salacuse's more recent observations. The twentieth century is often labeled the Age of Ideology, and the Cold War was perhaps the most bitter ideological contest of the twentieth century.

The United States has been referred to as the first nation-state founded on an ideology. The cultural heritage of the West, ranging from Cicero to the Enlightenment to Woodrow Wilson, has left an indelible imprint on American citizens: the notion that any group of "reasonable" people, sitting around a table and applying "right reason" to a dispute, will come to a consensus in a reasonable fashion. Hence they prefer short,

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<sup>121</sup> Arendt, *op. cit.*

informal negotiations, with both sides participating as equals and presenting their views in a straightforward manner.<sup>122</sup> Because of the emphasis on Reason and Rationality, Americans are notorious for “mirror imaging,” that is, the tendency to assume that all individuals share their “universal” norms and modes of reasoning and logic. That was clearly not the case during the Korean War negotiations.

Americans are nothing if not forthright, and even naïve at times: they believe they have no ideology, and that, consequently, others’ ideological motivations are phony. Frustration mounts when they are presented with a negotiating partner who does not conform to the Western notions of reason and logic, and who uses delaying tactics, endless repetition of demands, and the tactic of the “studied insult.” They are impatient.<sup>123</sup> The palpable anger in Joy’s *How Communists Negotiate* is a case in point, as is Ridgway’s transformation from the wise negotiator who lectured his subordinates on Oriental negotiating practices, to a man who raged against “treacherous savages.” Circumspection was foreign to the American concept of negotiation. Western liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights, clashed sharply with the communists’ emphasis on group rights — the integrity of the Revolution being their foremost concern. Mutual intransigence thus led directly to the POW exchange controversy. Ideology promotes an “us-them” mentality which inhibits open discussion of interests, as Salacuse has noted.<sup>124</sup> Americans are prone to this to at least as great an extent as other peoples, since the country is based wholly on

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<sup>122</sup> Robert J. Janosik, “Rethinking the Culture-Negotiation Link,” in J. William Breslin and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, eds., *Negotiation Theory and Practice*, (Cambridge: Program on Negotiation Books, 1991), pp. 235-46.

<sup>123</sup> Jeswald W. Salacuse, “Making Global Alliances: Paying Attention to the Process,” *Strategic Alliance Alert*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (November 1995)..

<sup>124</sup> Salacuse, *Making Global Deals*, pp. 42-71.

ideology, rather than factors such as ethnicity.

Based on the theories of Marx and Lenin, the PRC and USSR also embodied ideology, of an even more militant strain. As described by Kennan, a lifelong observer of the Soviet system, the tenets of Marxism held that (1) the system by which goods were produced and exchanged was the central fact of public life; (2) capitalism was a nefarious system of exploitation of the working class by the capital-owning class, and was incapable of distributing goods fairly; (3) capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction, since the capital-owning class was unable to adapt to economic change; (4) this inability to adjust would inevitably lead to the revolutionary transfer of power to the working classes; and (5) imperialism, the final stage of capitalism, leads directly to war and revolution.<sup>125</sup> The certainty of world revolution, sparked by war among capitalist states, was the touchstone of Marxist ideology. The Second World War was viewed as a titanic war among capitalists, so the destruction of the capitalist world was assessed to be near at hand. Agreements with capitalists were viewed as binding only to the extent that they promoted communist interests. Government control of the press allowed Mao and Stalin to mold public opinion in accordance with communist doctrine. There was little incentive, therefore, to make concessions to those who were on the brink of destruction.

Clearly, then, ideology fueled confrontation in Korea, on the battlefield, in the diplomatic arena, and at the negotiating table. Negotiators, like their political superiors, were careful to appear as exemplars of their national ideology. Heated rhetoric was the

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<sup>125</sup> Kennan, *op. cit.*, p. 566.

result: Joy labeled Nam an “arrogant dictator,”<sup>126</sup> while Nam once referred to Joy as his distinguished colleague, “whose name I forget.”<sup>127</sup> The war of words could have been even more contentious: on one occasion Nam referred to Joy as “dog food,” a deadly insult in the East, but one which the UNC team failed to comprehend.<sup>128</sup> The more public the negotiations are, the more likely it is that ideological conflict will surface. The Kaesong and Panmunjom negotiations, with their coterie of reporters, were nothing if not public. A running propaganda battle was the result, as was seen most prominently during the POW talks, when the U.S., while genuinely concerned for the prisoners’ welfare, was also determined to damage the international reputation of communism. Losing face was anathema to both sides. As Salacuse predicted,<sup>129</sup> hard and fast positions were the rule rather than the exception. Stueck summarized the roles of culture and ideology in typical incisive fashion: “The depth of animosity and suspicion between the two sides, ...grounded so deeply in culture, ideology, and historical circumstance, kept the prospects for an early settlement very much in doubt.”<sup>130</sup>

## TRUST

Mutual trust was virtually impossible at the table in Korea, blocked by ideologies linked to culture. Pitting two systems steeped in radically different cultural and ideological traditions frustrated the two sides’ halfhearted efforts to build trust. It seems fair to say that for negotiators on each side, personality, ideology and culture were

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<sup>126</sup> Joy, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Nam Il, quoted in Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>128</sup> General Kim, interview at the Fletcher School, April 9, 1997.

<sup>129</sup> Salacuse, *Making Global Deals*, p. 82.

<sup>130</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

mutually reinforcing elements. Negotiators, soldiers and diplomats on both sides — from Joy and Ridgway for the UNC, to Nam for the PRC and DPRK — tended toward extreme attitudes toward their counterparts as time wore on and frustration set in. With the passions aroused in wartime, probably the most competitive of all human interactions, the result was intransigence, with force as the ultimate arbiter of events. Threats and blustering fed into this state of affairs. The merging of ideology and culture with the ongoing geopolitical contest only exacerbated the problem of distrust.

#### CONTROL OF THE SITE

In “Your Place or Mine?” Salacuse and Jeffrey Z. Rubin note that the negotiating site should be neutral to the maximum extent possible.<sup>131</sup> Negotiating at a site dominated by one side introduces a “home-field advantage” which can hinder the search for negotiated solutions, and leave the visiting side at a marked disadvantage. As discussed above, that was the case in the negotiations at Kaesong in the summer of 1951. Though technically neutral, Kaesong lay in territory under PRC control. This allowed the communist delegation to orchestrate measures to humiliate the UNC, portraying it as a defeated supplicant in the international press, or as a brutal tyrant; conversely, the PRC projected the image of confident Chinese forces which had driven the capitalists to their knees, or as victims of capitalist-imperialist aggression. In this way the site could be used as a tool in the bitter propaganda war, and to promote communist ideology in the Cold War. While they enhanced communist power at the table in the short run, the tactics at Kaesong

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<sup>131</sup> Jeswald W. Salacuse and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, “Your Place or Mine?”, *Negotiation Journal*, January 1990, pp. 5-10.

fostered an adversarial climate at the outset, hardened UNC resolve not to grant concessions, and generally fed the tendency to positional bargaining.

#### **INTERNAL DYNAMICS: NEGOTIATING WITH ALLIES AND COUNTRYMEN**

Though to the unpracticed eye, internal dynamics might appear fundamentally different within the two sides, the distinction in reality was less sharp. Intuitively, an authoritarian system dominated by one power might be expected to display complete harmony, with the dominant power dictating policy. An alliance of Western democracies, with their emphasis on free debate, might be expected to have fractious relations unless faced with an overwhelming threat. In fact, relations among allies on both sides, and within the individual governments, were often turbulent.

Our knowledge of the inner working of the USSR, DPRK and PRC at the time is sparse, owing to the closed nature of communist societies. Still, it appears that the distribution of power fluctuated over the course of the Korean War. It seems clear that Kim would not have launched an invasion of the south without approval, and possibly active encouragement, from Moscow and Beijing.<sup>132</sup> Once the DPRK army ceased to be an effective fighting force under MacArthur's onslaught, Kim became completely dependent on his allies for survival, and his influence diminished sharply; hence Joy's impression that the Chinese representatives were in charge of the communist delegation. The Soviet Union seems to have dominated events from late 1950 until Stalin's death in 1953, when the balance swung to Beijing. It was not, though, a command relationship; careful diplomacy was the rule, and relations between the two communist giants were uniformly

characterized by tension. The Soviet Union supplied the bulk of the material and economic support for the war effort, including weapons, and especially jet aircraft and trained pilots; while Mao's government provided the overwhelming majority of the troops. The USSR initially joined in the militant Chinese approach after the PRC intervened in the war, but gradually, with the weight of war production straining socialist economies, Stalin began to nudge Mao toward a negotiated peace. *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* clearly signified the trend toward limited accommodation between the capitalist and socialist worlds. A shrewd politician, Stalin well understood the relationship of economics to the Soviet bloc's survival, and the need to relieve the economies of Soviet satellite nations. After Stalin's death, and with the Kremlin preoccupied with a succession struggle, Mao seems to have had the upper hand in the coalition. By 1953 he had concluded that it was time to end the war, since the United States seemed prepared to escalate. The choice was between a total war the PRC was unlikely to win, and a negotiated peace which would permit consolidation of his government and recovery from the recent civil war. Mao was unwilling to risk the integrity of the PRC on a skirmish in a secondary theater; and so he acquiesced in Eisenhower's final proposal.

Internal dynamics on the communist side were tranquil relative to the fierce disputes on the UNC side, and within the United States itself. Roger Fisher has identified three levels of internal negotiation: (1) among interest groups within governments; (2) between the negotiating team and the home government; and (3) among members of the

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<sup>132</sup> Taubman, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

negotiating team.<sup>133</sup> To these must be added the elements of public opinion and alliance politics.

The U.S. reliance on public support has been dealt with elsewhere, and need not be reiterated here; suffice it to say that as the fighting dragged on, attacks on both administrations intensified, wrecking Truman's bid for reelection and forcing Eisenhower to consider expanding the war. Another interesting phenomenon within the U.S. was the role of bureaucratic politics, or "interest groups" in Fisher's terminology: the tendency of different agencies, notably the departments of Defense and State, to take different organizational positions and defend them tenaciously. The decision on whether to escalate was one topic of furious debate; the POW issue was another. Commanders in the field also sought to influence policy: the Truman-MacArthur controversy was discussed above, and Ridgway and Clark vainly sought an uncompromising stance during their tenures. Relations between Joy's and Harrison's negotiating teams and their superiors in Washington were fairly harmonious, with the chief negotiators providing regular input to decision-makers; but there is little evidence that they engaged in intense advocacy. The U.S. decision-making process had important ramifications for the UNC negotiating delegation. The UNC position on POWs evolved from one of accommodation to a hard and fast insistence on voluntary repatriation, as State and Defense formulated their positions and sought to persuade Truman and Eisenhower of their correctness.

This is not a diplomatic history of the 1950s, and a detailed analysis of UNC alliance

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<sup>133</sup> Roger Fisher, "Negotiating Inside Out: What Are the Best Ways to Relate Internal Negotiations with External Ones?", in Breslin and Rubin, ed., *Negotiation Theory and Practice*, pp. 71-79.

politics will not be attempted here. Great events were underway elsewhere, ranging from European integration to decolonization. Suffice it to say that allied support underlay the American position in Korea, and that American diplomacy was calculated to appeal to allies as well as citizens at home. In their public statements, Truman and Eisenhower sought the correct blend of messianic rhetoric, to appeal to the American people; of firmness, to maintain credibility with the adversaries; and of flexibility, to soothe allies who were increasingly restive. The allies resented any hint of American intransigence, and they feared a global war as an outgrowth of Korea. Churchill in particular pushed Eisenhower toward a settlement of the POW dispute in 1953. The decline of automatic voting majorities for the United States in the General Assembly, as decolonization progressed, also weakened the U.S. position.

These considerations, though, pale in comparison to the stormy relations between Rhee and Eisenhower in June 1953. It seems fair to say that, since Rhee was totally dependent on the UNC, Truman and Eisenhower had been inattentive to his interests. He had been agitating for a mutual-security treaty for some time, and the unilateral POW release of June 18 may have been avoided had he gotten a treaty earlier. Truman and Eisenhower should have stated plainly that they no longer had any intention of seeking Korean unification on the battlefield. Instead, Rhee attempted to sabotage the armistice on the eve of its signing, and was very nearly successful. Alliance and domestic politics were among the numerous factors propelling the UNC toward a settlement, as they were for the communist opposition.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF CRISIS AND NEGOTIATIONS

William L. Ury and Richard Smoke have identified four elements of a crisis: conditions of high pressure; high stakes; uncertain and incomplete information for the decision-maker; and a perception of narrowing options.<sup>134</sup> The closest historical analogy for Korea was 1918, when the Allies had pressed the final great offensive until Germany actually signed an armistice; the Germans were presented with the stark choice of total defeat or an armistice.

That case is instructive. For both sides, the Korean War in a sense ceased to be a crisis, despite continuing sporadic fighting, once the UNC offensive ground to a halt in mid-1951. This had the dual effect, for both sides, of allowing them to harden their positions, and of weakening alliance cohesion. The lack of a perceived imminent threat of battlefield defeat removed not only a powerful unifying force for each side, but also the incentive to make concessions and seek creative solutions to the Korean dilemma. Ultimately, the conflict seemed to turn on whether Eisenhower could credibly recreate the sense of crisis and thereby compel a settlement at the negotiating table. Ultimately he used a variety of tactics, ranging from posturing to a military buildup, to raise the stakes for the opponents and reimpose a sense of urgency at the table.

The effects of stalemate were felt in different ways on each side. For the United States, especially, the lack of a sense of crisis led to the weakening of allied support for the war; paralysis is the rule, rather than the exception, for alliances which face no impending threat. It led to questioning at home of why America was not seeking victory, in

MacArthur's absolute sense of the word, over the "monstrous conspiracy" Truman had described. High pressure was relaxed, as was the perception of narrowing options. The UNC took a tough stance, encouraged by a generally favorable military position. The value of the stakes was questioned by many, both at home and abroad. Ultimately, the prolonged diplomatic and military deadlock did recreate a sense of crisis, in the key decision-makers at least, as weakening support compelled Truman and Eisenhower to seek ways to break the logjam. In his memoirs, Eisenhower's remarks about having no choice but to break the negotiation stalemate militarily are a palpable reminder that he saw his options narrowing. His perception of crisis led him to take decisive action diplomatically, by transmitting his willingness to escalate militarily.

For the communists, Truman's decision to halt the 1951 offensive removed the incentive for an early armistice, and it encouraged them to delay for additional UNC concessions at the table. They were unlikely to dislodge the UNC militarily, but, through adroit use of Mao's strategic theory, they thought they could prevail by prolonging the war and attacking U.S. domestic support. With economic crisis threatening by 1953, they too felt obliged to reevaluate the stakes, ultimately deciding the stakes did not justify the risk of military defeat. Their options had narrowed to large-scale war on a peripheral front, or acquiescence in the *status quo ante bellum*. Considering how near communist forces had come to being overrun in the fall of 1950, and again in 1951, the *status quo* seemed an acceptable choice.

## REPUTATIONS

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<sup>134</sup> William L. Ury and Richard Smoke, "Anatomy of a Crisis," in *ibid.*, pp. 47-54.

The role of reputation became increasingly important as the war neared its denouement, most notably in the case of Dwight D. Eisenhower. Why was Eisenhower able to prevail, where the formidable Harry S. Truman had failed? President Truman was known as a tough individual, who had brought the Second World War to a successful close and orchestrated U.S. policy and strategy to wage a Cold War. Additionally, he was the only statesman ever to order a nuclear attack on an enemy; surely, then, he could have credibly threatened to escalate the war, bringing an early settlement? There is no clear answer in the literature, but it seems likely that Truman's credibility with the communists declined over the course of the war. After Chinese intervention, he was extraordinarily reluctant to risk direct Soviet intervention; hence his many public statements that avoiding a general conflagration was a central war aim. He was visibly reluctant to allow Ridgway to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1951, which could only reinforce this perception. The firing of MacArthur, an outspoken advocate of total war, did not help him in attempts at nuclear saber-rattling. Thomas Schelling has observed that, if an individual has demonstrated firm commitment in the past, he may persuade an adversary that the risk of severe consequences is preferable to sacrificing principle.<sup>135</sup> Through his public agonizing, Truman probably relinquished that edge in dealing with the communists.

Eisenhower, by contrast, was an unknown quantity for Stalin and Mao. Reputation in negotiation can be thought of as a combination of power, which the United States possessed in abundance; the willingness to use power; and credibility in statements

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<sup>135</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, "An Essay on Bargaining," in *Strategy of Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 21-80.

regarding that willingness. Eisenhower was the victor of the European war, which gave him automatic credibility as a wielder of military force. Throughout the 1952 campaign he issued a series of political speeches condemning alleged Democratic weakness on Korea, and suggesting the need for escalation. He went to Korea as President-elect, and secured agreement among his Cabinet designees on the need to break the stalemate, at a follow-on conference at Wake Island.<sup>136</sup> He enjoyed the traditional “honeymoon” period during which a new president has increased political freedom of action. His 1953 State of the Union Address contained a number of belligerent notes, and he threatened the PRC’s eastern flank by ordering the Seventh Fleet away from Formosa. He had developed a reputation as a stern diplomat to go along with his reputation as one of America’s greatest soldiers. By making a public commitment, he lay this reputation on the line, and was able to persuade Stalin and Mao that he was willing to run grave risks for the sake of principle.

### THREAT

A threat, wrote Schelling, is an attempt to communicate one’s intention to take a drastic action. It is designed to impress on the adversary the automatic consequences of his actions. It must be credible, since an adversary must be convinced that one’s own incentives demand such an action. One effective way to generate credibility is to stake one’s personal reputation on an action by making a public, hence irrevocable, commitment. Taking a final position and standing by it is a means of issuing a public commitment.<sup>137</sup> That, perhaps, was Truman’s mistake: he took a final position through his absolute

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<sup>136</sup> Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, pp. 93-96.

<sup>137</sup> Schelling, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-80.

rhetoric, yet continued to search for solutions at the table; hence leading the communists to question his firmness.

A public commitment by a statesman or a negotiator is a dual-edged sword. It can galvanize public support at home or among allies, and it can impress negotiating partners. On the other hand, if left unfulfilled, it can generate apathy and cynicism within one's own side; and it unquestionably hardens one's negotiating position, inhibiting the search for creative solutions. Stalemate may result as easily as victory, as each side takes an immovable position. Eisenhower managed to avoid this trap. Not only was he personally convinced that a military solution was necessary in Korea, he staked his reputation on it. Through adroit diplomacy, he managed to convince the communists that the domestic and international pressure — his incentives to make good on the threat — required military action, not capitulation. He was convinced that his threat was decisive: in his memoirs he wrote of his State of the Union Address,

The practical value of the announcement was simply this: like my visit to Korea, it put the Chinese Communists on notice that the days of stalemate were numbered; that the Korean War would either end or extend beyond Korea. *It thus helped, I am convinced, to end that war*<sup>138</sup> (emphasis added).

The gamble worked. Schelling observed that the negotiator “does have an incentive to bind himself to fulfill the threat, if he thinks the threat may be successful, because the threat and not its fulfillment gains the end; and fulfillment is not necessary if the threat succeeds.”<sup>139</sup> Happily that was the case in 1953, and President Eisenhower managed to end the war without further useless bloodshed.

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<sup>138</sup> Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, p. 123.

## POWER AND ALTERNATIVES: THE ZERO-SUM GAME

In Korea, the United States never fathomed a relationship which was readily apparent to their opponents: that negotiating power is not necessarily equivalent to national power. “[T]he history of international relations,” note Rubin and Salacuse, “is filled with examples of large states who failed to force small states to do their bidding.”<sup>140</sup> For a variety of reasons, many highlighted previously, American leaders were unable to grasp the fact of communist intransigence. Mao, Stalin and Kim suffered crushing battlefield reverses in 1950-1951. How, then, were they able to avert defeat at the negotiating table, reestablish the *status quo*, and even gain a measure of respect for communism worldwide?

The answer is simple: they never admitted defeat. The communists understood clearly the nature of bargaining power, and its use to manipulate their own and the UNC’s best alternatives to negotiated settlement (BATNAs). Schelling defined bargaining power as “the power to fool and bluff” stemming from national power and a credible commitment to using power. This “Commitment Tactic” involves communicating to the other side what the “final” position is, and the level of commitment to that position. Evidence of previous adherence to principle is indispensable in the use of commitment. As seen above, public commitment is an especially powerful variant of the commitment tactic which was used by both sides in Korea. The risk of public commitment, however, is that it

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<sup>139</sup> Schelling, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

can generate *two* immovable positions, leading to a stalemate or a breakdown in talks<sup>141</sup> — a not infrequent occurrence in Kaesong and Panmunjom. That is the dilemma of post-Versailles Treaty public diplomacy. Each side may become ensnared in positional consideration, with subjective factors eclipsing rational calculations and preventing any accommodation; this is the phenomenon referred to as entrapment,<sup>142</sup> when negotiators feel they have too much invested to quit. It becomes impossible to cut one's losses. Whatever the case, it is difficult to retreat from a public commitment, particularly in a democracy, since a retreat may undermine one's credibility with the other side, and with one's own citizens and allies.

The concept of BATNAs was central to the armistice negotiations, as each side sought to buttress its own bargaining leverage and damage that of its adversaries. Bargaining power, argued David A. Lax and James K. Sebenius, is the power to modify alternatives,<sup>143</sup> in a variation on Schelling's theme. If one side has a favorable BATNA, then its incentive to reach a settlement is relatively weak; if both sides view their alternatives as favorable, there will likely be no zone of possible agreement (ZOPA), and hence no agreement. If the BATNA's value is perceived to equal or exceed the perceived value of a settlement, a settlement is even more unlikely. Hence the key to negotiation is to improve one's own BATNA, and, when possible, to undermine that of the other side.

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<sup>140</sup> Jeffrey Z. Rubin, and Jeswald W. Salacuse, "The Problem of Power in International Negotiations," *International Affairs*, April 1990, p. 26.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-80.

<sup>142</sup> J. Brockner, Jeffrey Z. Rubin, J. Fine, T. P. Hamilton, B. Thomas, and B. Turetsky, "Factors Affecting Entrapment in Escalating Conflicts: The Importance of Timing," *Journal of Research in Personality*, 16: 1982, pp. 247-66.

Especially in wartime, perhaps the most competitive of human endeavors, alternatives may be interlocking; that is, when one side improves its BATNA, that of the other side necessarily suffers. This is the much-cited theory of the “zero-sum game.” All of the elements of national power can be used to manipulate alternatives: diplomatic, economic and, of course, military. A peace offensive is one useful option. A buildup of military power is a typical strategy in wartime: the UNC’s deployment of massive air power to South Korea, for example, strengthened the UNC’s position in negotiation, while undermining the communist war effort. With its preponderance of economic and military might, the military dimension clearly favored the UNC.

The communists, lacking America’s imposing economic and military power, used a more subtle strategy to improve their own, and especially damage the UNC’s BATNAs. Failing a settlement, the BATNA for both sides was to keep fighting, and to keep haggling. The communists adeptly used Mao’s theory of protracted war to improve their bargaining position. Rubin and Salacuse, echoing Mao, identified several tactics for the weaker side, including stonewalling and exploiting internal dissent in the other side.<sup>144</sup> The communists used these tactics to perfection. Though in a difficult position militarily, they transformed military defeat into near-victory. Truman’s decision to halt the offensive in 1951 removed military pressure for an armistice, and opened an intriguing possibility for Mao and Stalin. With shrewd insight into the nature of politics and war, the communists perceived that the United States would likely be less committed than they to a protracted

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<sup>143</sup> David A. Lax and James K. Sebenius, “Alternatives to Agreement,” in Breslin and Rubin, ed., *Negotiation Theory and Practice*, p. 47.

<sup>144</sup> Rubin and Salacuse, “The Problem of Power,” p. 26.

war. Mao reasoned that America, a democracy resting on public opinion, would be unwilling to wage a prolonged war in a secondary theater. Hence the communists could undermine tenuous, and fleeting, public and allied support for the war — most notably, America's trinity of war — by delaying, and by wielding the propaganda tool effectively. This would damage the UNC's BATNA of continuing the war, and improve their own alternatives by mobilizing the Soviet and Chinese populations. The communists used their few advantages to maximum effect, portraying the UNC alternately as prostrate or domineering. Unlike their opponents, they realized that the weaker party, from a material standpoint, could be the stronger party at the table. For that reason, Mao on several occasions lectured his followers on the need to avoid concessions under pressure.<sup>145</sup> That they did not ultimately prevail does not detract from their wisdom.

With classic American naïveté, and with boundless faith in the power of reasoned discourse, the United States played into communist hands. Belying his tough rhetoric about the survival of civilization — in effect, an early public commitment — Truman halted Ridgway's offensive. Public agonizing over expanding the war was duly noted by communist analysts. In Schelling's terms, this decreased the communists' incentives to yield; Lax and Sebenius might note that this unilateral decision damaged the UNC's BATNA, while substantially improving that of the PRC. Both sides had issued public commitments, but one had relented. His intentions of fostering a collegial negotiating atmosphere, and limiting the scale of violence, were laudable; but Truman's reputation as a war leader suffered in communist eyes, and any future public commitments were to be

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<sup>145</sup> Stueck, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

doubted. Brodie offered a succinct analysis:

Restraint as a demonstration of “good will” to the opponent is preposterous when we are at war with him and are killing his people. It may be a manifestation of “good faith” connected with some ongoing negotiation, but in such instances it should be conditioned upon visible reciprocity.<sup>146</sup>

Clausewitz too lambasted “kind-hearted people” who thought war could be won painlessly, through polite negotiation or other painless means. In Brodie’s view, and indeed in my view, the adept wartime statesman keeps the military pressure on the enemy, so as to avoid removing the incentive to reach an equitable and early agreement for peace. If we are negotiating for peace, it is clear that we value a negotiated settlement more highly than our BATNA; the trick is to ensure that the value of the adversary’s BATNA — fighting on — is perceived as far inferior to the value of an agreement. If successful, that would swing the balance of negotiating power in our favor. That would seem to be the lesson of 1918, when the Allies presented the Germans with the prospect of a BATNA, fighting on until total defeat, which was far less palatable than a negotiated armistice. A similar approach may have been more effective for Truman in Korea.<sup>147</sup>

A brief review of the POW dispute illustrates the concepts of power and alternatives in action. The United States, led by Truman, viewed voluntary repatriation as a tool for maintaining the support of the American people for the war, improving its BATNA; and as a means of discrediting communism, thus damaging the Chinese BATNA of delaying an end to the fighting. For his part, Mao sought to escape this trap and turn it

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<sup>146</sup> Brodie, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>147</sup> The human costs of fighting at a higher intensity level may not exceed those of seeking peace through protracted talks. The UNC suffered more casualties during the “negotiation phase” of the Korean War than in the “hostilities phase.”

to his advantage. By infiltrating agents into the South Korean POW camps, he had a handy propaganda instrument: he could organize resistance to screening and order riots which inevitably provoked violent responses from Rhee's troops. Images of UNC brutality were dutifully reported in the international press, thus undermining support for the war, and by extension the UNC's BATNA. This tactic was reinforced by appeals to international law (the Geneva Convention). The ebb and flow of power and alternatives in Korea is a fascinating case study in the dynamics of war termination.

By the summer of 1953, both sides' BATNAs — fighting on — were becoming less and less palatable, and a settlement looked more inviting. In the early going the United States still hoped for an early diplomatic settlement, and its absolute rhetoric compelled it to continue the war. For a time the communists' BATNA was actually improved by a stalemate, as China reaped propaganda benefits from having driven the world's strongest power back from the Yalu. Protracted, desultory fighting worsened things. The United States still desired a negotiated settlement, but declined to improve its alternatives by military means. Internal pressures mounted, as the American people and the UN allies balked at continuing the war. Within the communist bloc, matters were even worse, with chaos in the Kremlin and economic conditions fueling unrest in Eastern Europe. Internal pressures in the United States, China and the Soviet Union intensified, and squabbles with allies worsened matters. The communists faced a dilemma: a prolonged war of attrition would undermine the American will to fight, but it also might provoke escalation if there was no prospect of a settlement. It was a difficult balancing act. The fundamental difference was that a worsening BATNA for the United States compelled it to consider

escalation, while the communists, with no prospect of battlefield victory, felt they had to concede. The combination of external pressure from Eisenhower with internal pressures ultimately proved decisive.

Finally the United States grasped the relationship of negotiating and national power. "Power," observed Rubin and Salacuse, "must be *usable* if it is to be applied effectively. A nuclear arsenal, and the mightiest economic club in the world, are of little strategic value unless the state holding them is believed to be willing to use them."<sup>148</sup> Under Eisenhower, unrivaled American physical power was matched with a diplomatic offensive which underlined the nation's willingness to use that power in an escalation; perhaps even including nuclear weapons. The president's credibility as a stern anti-communist only enhanced this threat. Finally, the logjam was broken, and a *status quo* was reestablished which is still intact today.

## CONCLUSIONS

"War is hell," exclaimed General Sherman in 1865. It is also a form of negotiation, by violent means. To mitigate the infernal effects of war, the American way of war, and of diplomacy, requires substantial refinement. American strategic culture was largely forged in the Civil War crusade against slavery, and in the global crusades against Wilhelmine Weltpolitik, fascism and Japanese militarism: Americans henceforth assumed that war involved utterly defeating adversaries and dictating peace terms. Negotiation, in this view, would be of the straightforward kind that occurs between victor and vanquished after total wars. Diplomacy was thought to end once hostilities began, and remain

subordinate until the soldiers' work was done. Hence the coordination of diplomacy and national strategy was uniformly poor — witness Acheson's ill-considered remarks in 1950 and 1951. That is one reason American political and military leaders found adapting to the era of limited war, and its ambiguities, to be so difficult. Some measure of persuasion of the opponent is crucial. Falling short of total victory frustrates us even today — hence the scorn heaped on President Bush in 1991 for declining to topple Saddam Hussein's regime, despite limited war aims agreed to by the United Nations. MacArthur, the exemplar of the American way of war, had it wrong: war is policy and negotiation by violent means, not violence as an end in itself.

There are also few purely diplomatic solutions in war. Key U.S. leaders considered the challenge in Korea to be purely diplomatic once full-scale combat had been suspended, with reasoned negotiation believed to be ascendant. That was a problem with a foe who resisted being "reasonable." War and diplomacy are intertwined and interactive. So long as we are seeking to compel an opponent, military pressure must be maintained in order to increase negotiating power and speed a settlement. Else the conflict may become prolonged, with negative effects on public morale and consequent pressure on decision-makers to give in. That is the reality of American political culture: citizens demand quick victory at low cost, preferably for both sides. A monumental task, rallying public support for limited efforts may confound even the most accomplished of statesmen.

The armistice negotiations were a perfect illustration of the impact of internal and external pressure on both sides. They sought to improve their own alternatives and

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<sup>148</sup> Rubin and Salacuse, "The Problem of Power," p. 34.

damage their opponents' alternatives, thereby swinging the balance of negotiating power their way. They viewed any sign of concessions as weakness inviting a more aggressive stance. The United States suffered from wavering allied and public support, eventually convincing Eisenhower of the need for drastic military action to relieve the diplomatic impasse. For their part, the communist governments felt the urgent need not to lose face internationally, since that may have limited the appeal of communism for aspiring revolutionaries around the globe. As all totalitarian societies do, they also needed to maintain continuous political mobilization of the masses at home. State control of the press blunted the impact of Soviet and Chinese public opinion, but it was critical nonetheless. Economic pressures had to be considered as well. Both sides came under pressure, and the UNC was fortunate that its adversaries relented first.

To what extent may the negotiations be considered successful? They fulfilled their mandate to settle the "purely military" questions necessary to conclude an armistice. Indeed, the agreement at Panmunjom has held for 44 years. As a stepping-stone to an overall political settlement, they were a dismal failure. Both sides could plausibly claim victory, since the United States achieved its political objective of reversing aggression and China had preserved the DPRK. The interminable deadlock at the table cost both sides dearly in lives and treasure; and the military and diplomatic stalemate of 1953 remains to this day. Only now are the first halting steps being taken toward a rapprochement. Heretofore the ideological and cultural gap has proven too wide to bridge through negotiation.

Finally, the negotiations were a reminder of the need, insofar as possible, to purge

international affairs of its crusading dimension. Each side, invoking moral principle and damning the other as a global villain, found it well-nigh impossible to make any concessions. Their rhetoric was eerily similar in that regard. In essence, crusaders issue public commitments at the outset, and then either have to stand by them or face the prospect of international and domestic humiliation. It is difficult to discuss interests with the devil himself: hence deadlock is a frequent outgrowth of clashes between messianic systems. The United States failed to learn the lessons of Korea, and repeated its mistakes in Vietnam in the 1960s, with worse results. Distinguished statesmen from George F. Kennan to Henry Kissinger have therefore advised against excessive moralism in foreign policy. In order to focus on interests vice positions — the keystone of international negotiation and diplomacy — flexibility and pragmatism must be preserved.