

# UNITES STATES NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

## THE CRISIS IN KOREA, JULY 06, 1950

### Yalta Conference



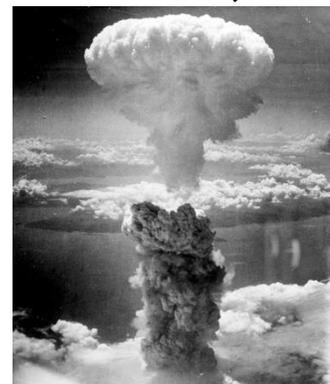
In February of 1945, United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin met to discuss postwar conditions in Yalta, located in the Soviet Union. President Roosevelt mentioned the ever-intensifying issues in the Korean peninsula. He proposed that a partnership, known as a trusteeship, be established between the United States, China, and the Soviet Union governing Korea until the nation was stable enough to rule itself.<sup>1</sup> Stalin declared that the time period during which this trusteeship would take place should be as

short as possible, yet it was not put into action. Other than this brief mentioning, Korea was not discussed further at Yalta or again until later in 1945.

### Post-Yalta Conference



Just two months after the Yalta Conference, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died and was succeeded by President Harry Truman. On August 6, 1945, the United States used nuclear weapons on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrendered thereafter, and instability and chaos



became prevalent in Japan and throughout the surrounding area in Asia. The impending instability became more pronounced in Korea and the United States became more concerned.

Disagreement arose over what should be done next. The Soviet Union advanced into Manchuria, leaving the United States fearful of the Soviet influence spreading into the Korean peninsula. United States Army planners in the War Department and the State Department proposed a plan to divide Korea at the 38th parallel, leaving the Soviets to occupy the area north of the 38<sup>th</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Yalta Conference." *National Archives Catalog*. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/10503523>

parallel and the Americans to occupy the area south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Union quickly agreed to this and began to occupy major cities in the north. The United States followed suit in September of 1945 and started to occupy areas in the south.<sup>3</sup>

In early 1948, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the Korean people should elect a national assembly for the entire country. At this point in time, the United Nations General Assembly believed that Korea was prepared to rule themselves and become more independent. South Koreans participated in a UN monitored election to select members for the national assembly.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Syngman Rhee became the president. In July of 1948, the country's constitution was ratified and the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in August of that same year. Once the ROK was formally established, the United States removed their presence from the area. The Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), which consisted of 500 soldiers, stayed to continue training ROK officers.<sup>5</sup> The ROK's army thus consisted of a lightly armed force whose main objective was to maintain internal order. Considering it was a newly independent nation, it was important that national armed forces existed in order to prevent any large outbreak of violence.

While the Republic of Korea was participating in free elections and working to become independent, a different scenario was happening north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The Soviet Union prohibited elections from taking place and, instead, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established in the fall of 1948.<sup>6</sup> The Soviets supplied the newly established DPRK army with tanks, artillery, and ammunition. Kim Il Sung became the leader of the DPRK.

### **The Long Telegram: Containment**

Written in 1946 by George Kennan, the Long Telegram became a foundational document of American foreign policy during the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> Kennan had been one of the original American diplomats to be stationed in the Soviet Union and grew over his many years in Moscow to view the Soviet Union as an entity unable to have a "permanent peaceful coexistence" with the west because the Soviet Union viewed itself as in a perpetual war against capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Kennan believed that the organizational structure of the Soviet Union prevented it from being able to perceive and understand objective reality. For Kennan, while the Soviet Union's aggression came from a place of neuroses and nationalism, he felt that rather than seeking direct confrontations with the Soviet Union (that could result in a massive amount of violence or nuclear war), the United States should seek to prevent the growth of communism. In this sense, the United States should be patient and wait for the internal divisions and economic weakness inherent to the Soviet system to bring it down. During the early Cold War, the Long Telegram was a fundamental part of American Foreign

<sup>2</sup> "Korean War Fast Facts." *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/28/world/asia/korean-war-fast-facts/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> "Memo, Dean Acheson to Harry S. Truman with Attachment, September 14, 1945" *Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum*. [https://trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/koreanwar/documents/index.php?documentdate=1945-09-14&documentid=kr-1-2&pagenumber=1](https://trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/koreanwar/documents/index.php?documentdate=1945-09-14&documentid=kr-1-2&pagenumber=1).

<sup>4</sup> "Truman Orders US Forces to Korea" *History* <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/truman-orders-u-s-forces-t>.

<sup>5</sup> "Korean War Fast Facts." *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/28/world/asia/korean-war-fast-facts/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> "Understanding the North Korean Regime" *The Wilson Center*. [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ap\\_understand](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ap_understand).

<sup>7</sup> "George Kennan." *History.com*. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/george-kennan-sends-long-telegram-to-state-department>.

<sup>8</sup> "The Long Telegram." *Truman Library*. [https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/6-6.pdf](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/6-6.pdf).

policy, informing the so-called Truman Doctrine as well as American involvement throughout the world during the entire Cold War.

## Risk of Soviet and Chinese Involvement

Beginning in 1945, the Kuomintang government of the Republic of China and the Communist Party of China fought in what would become known as the Chinese Civil War or the Chinese Communist Revolution.<sup>9</sup> Since ending in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party has been leading the Chinese government.<sup>10</sup> The communist ideals present in governments of China, the DPRK, and the Soviet Union served as a point of unity for the three nations, especially against the United States. The Communist victory in China was politically damaging for the Truman administration as many Americans and allied nations felt that the United States was not able to contain communism due to Truman's weak foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> The "Loss of China" (as it became known) caused a sense of paranoia in the United States that led to accusations of communists hidden within the military, State Department, and Democratic Party more broadly. This red scare saw individuals accused of being communists, or communist sympathizers, losing their jobs and livelihoods, and sometimes being sent to jail.



The Soviet Union was very influential in the formation of the DPRK, particularly as they provided the majority of the DPRK's military weaponry.<sup>12</sup> Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the DPRK were established immediately in 1948.<sup>13</sup> At that time, Stalin said that the Soviet Union was ready to begin diplomatic and economic relations and exchange ambassadors with the DPRK.

Given the Soviet Union and China's commitment to the DPRK, it was reasonable to fear that they may intervene on behalf of the DPRK if a conflict arises. Yet, it is impossible to know the extent to which they may intervene to aid the DPRK. Direct intervention by China or the Soviet Union could be extremely costly and detrimental to the United States and its efforts to protect and preserve democracy.

## The Beginning of the Conflict

On June 25, 1950, the DPRK sent 750,000 troops south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to invade the Republic of Korea.<sup>14</sup> Troops from the DPRK advanced as far south as Seoul. In response, the United States worked to pass a resolution in the Security Council of the United Nations that called for military assistance to the Republic of Korea. The Soviet Union did not participate in this resolution since they were boycotting the UN Security Council.

<sup>9</sup> "Chinese Civil War." *New World Encyclopedia*. [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Chinese\\_Civil\\_War](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Chinese_Civil_War).

<sup>10</sup> "China-North Korea Relations." *The Wilson Center*. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/115/china-north-korea-rela>.

<sup>11</sup> "Harry Truman and Revolution in China, 1949." *The Examiner*. <http://www.examiner.net/article/20140607/news/140609103>.

<sup>12</sup> "Understanding the North Korean Regime." *The Wilson Center*.

[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ap\\_understand](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ap_understand).

<sup>13</sup> "China, the Soviet Union, and the Korean War." *Journal of Conflict Studies*.

<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/368>.

<sup>14</sup> "The Korean War." *History*. <https://www.history.com/topics/korean-war>.

The United States is suspicious that the Soviet Union suggested or supported (or both) that the DPRK sent its forces south to invade the ROK. On June 27th, in order to aid ROK fighting the DPRK's invasion, President Truman ordered US naval and air forces to aid ROK in their fight against the DPRK.<sup>15</sup> This was done after the UN Security Council's resolution passed and the ROK requested help.

### Dean Acheson's Remarks

1950 began like most other years after World War II, some newly decolonized nations approved their constitutions, fighting continued between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China, and the American government and public worried about communist spies. On January 12<sup>th</sup>, Secretary of State Dean Acheson spoke before the National Press Club, in what some considered to be a relatively minor policy speech. In his speech he outlined what he called America's 'defensive perimeter' in the Asia Pacific region. This included occupied Japan, the Philippines, a previous American territory/colony, and the Aleutian Islands, part of Alaska.<sup>16</sup> Notably left out of this security guarantee were Taiwan, where the recently defeated anti-communist forces of the Republic of China had fled, and Republic of Korea.<sup>17</sup> 5 months later DPRK would invade the Republic of Korea. Some



people believe, in particular future President Eisenhower, that Acheson's speech gave Kim Il-Sung, the 'green-light' to invade the Republic of Korea because the United States would not come to its defense.<sup>18</sup> While modern day historians have vigorously debated whether Kim decided to act after Acheson's speech, most contemporary and modern commentators believe that the speech signaled that the United States was not willing to defend South Korea nor bear the costs of doing so. These individuals believe that if the United States had signaled its willingness to defend South Korea, through speeches as well as concrete actions, such as a substantial placement of Americans in South Korea, then Kim never would have been emboldened to invade and the Soviet Union never would have approved the invasion to avoid a confrontation with the United States.

### Tensions Involving General MacArthur

United States General Douglas MacArthur is widely regarded as a war hero. President Truman recognized MacArthur's talent and, at the end of World War II, he appointed MacArthur to be the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan. General MacArthur, along with remaining US forces, enacted a variety of political, social, and economic reforms in order to restore stability in Japan.<sup>19</sup> Currently, General MacArthur has been put in charge of the American-led coalition of UN troops. He has made it clear that he is in support of using all the force necessary in order to push back

<sup>15</sup> "Truman Orders US Air Forces to Korea" *History* <https://www.history.com/topics/korean-war>

<sup>16</sup> "Speech on the Far East." *CIA*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1950-01-12.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> "Dean Acheson's Press Club Speech Reexamined." *The Journal of Conflict Studies*. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/366/578>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> "The Redacted Testimony That Fully Explains Why General MacArthur Was Fired" *Smithsonian*.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/redacted-testimony-fully-explains-why-general-macarthur-was-fired-180960622/>.

the DPRK's troops. President Truman made it clear that he would like to end the conflict in a more peaceful manner negotiating and requesting that the DPRK's forces return north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Yet, President Truman was still willing to aid the ROK in the fight against the DPRK. This differing of opinion has already caused tensions that are only likely to increase.

## Response of the International Community

On both June 25 and June 27, 1950, the United Nations passed directives calling for a ceasefire and for all member nations to provide aid to South Korea. As previously mentioned, the Soviet Union has expressed opposition to the Security Council and the United Nations, thus making the passing of these directives easily possible as the Soviets were not present to veto the resolution. Both the Soviet

Union and the United States have many allies around the world. Whether or not these allies provide their support in a time of impending crisis is unknown at this time.

