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Warrior Pride: General MacArthur vs. the State

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Warrior Pride: General MacArthur vs. the State

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Ian Joseph Ullmann

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

*For my grandfathers, Walter Ullmann and Joseph Andres,
veterans of the United States Army, who served during the Forgotten War.*

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The Peacemongers

They will tell of the peace eternal
And predict all will be well;
They will scorn the path of war's red wrath
And grant it the road to hell
They will set aside their warrior pride,
And their love for their fighting sons;
But at the end they will turn again
To planes, and ships, and guns.

They will tell of the peace eternal
As all dreamers do;
They'll tear their hair in their despair
When the red blight strikes them through.
They will wring their hands in stricken lands,
And call their chosen ones
To save their homes midst bleaching bones
Of planes, and ships, and guns.

They will tell of the peace eternal-
But can such peace succeed?
And what of the foe that plans a blow,
And what of the nation's need?
The letters blaze on history's page,
And ever the writing runs:
God in hand with native land,
And planes, and ships, and guns.

-Douglas MacArthur, General of the Army, January 20, 1960

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Introduction

The complexity of civil-military relations can best be described with the assistance of William Shakespeare. The political tragedy *Coriolanus* tells the story of the title Roman general who succeeds in defending his country against several uprisings. A hero of Rome, the general is persuaded to seek consulship, the highest political office in the Republic. Despite initial popular support, his temperament proves to be incompatible with the political arena; his leadership is rejected by the Roman commoners, who quickly withdraw their support. Coriolanus is deposed and subsequently betrays Rome, for which he is later hacked to death.¹ The tragedy of *Coriolanus* reveals the dilemma of a civil-military divide. Ancient Rome routinely allowed military heroes to serve in government without resigning their respective officer positions. The same can be said about the politicians, who could simultaneously commission as generals in the army. The result was an overall lack of corporateness and expertise with the latter only consisting of the application of violence and nothing else. After centuries of war and peace around the world, civil-military relations developed far beyond the Roman model. While many states would eventually embrace this concept of civil-military divide, they did so not without instances of crisis. The relationship between the soldier and the statesman has been historically complex in many national narratives, especially with regard to authority and subordination. These tensions are only further amplified during a time of war.

In *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, Eliot Cohen analyzes four case studies of wartime leadership when the statesmen were pitted directly against

¹ Shakespeare, William. 1974. *Coriolanus*. Harmondsworth: New York, NY: Penguin Books.

their generals. As a former soldier in the United States Army Reserve and the former Counselor to the U.S. Department of State during the George W. Bush Administration, Mr. Cohen has been a practitioner of both officership and statesmanship. He asks the question of who should maintain supreme command in a time of war: the soldier or the statesman. Looking at the examples set by Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill, and David Ben-Gurion, Cohen's case studies all point to the same answer: the statesman.

The fundamental argument in Cohen's theoretical framework comes from Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), a Prussian general considered to be the greatest military scholar of all time. His most famous piece, *Vom Kriege* ("On War") was written after the Napoleonic Wars and published after his death. It continues to serve as an essential theoretical guidebook for present-day strategists. In it, Clausewitz conceived the idea that war is an extension of politics, stating "that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."² According to Clausewitz, every aspect of war has political implications, and every military action is vulnerable to political consequences. Since the political nature of war is inevitable, it falls on the civilian leadership to adjust war strategy to serve the ends of politics. While these Clausewitzian truths are well established in civil-military theory, Cohen argues that he takes things too far, that "if every facet of military life may have political consequences, if one cannot find a refuge from politics in the levels of war, civil-military relations are problematic."³ Clausewitz suggests that the statesman may intervene on tactical decisions of war-making, despite (usually) not having the proper judgement or

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 87.

³ Cohen, Eliot A. 2002. *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime*. (New York, NY: Free Press), 8.

knowledge. At the same time, the generals would be free to insert themselves into political decision-making. Constitutionally speaking, the commander-in-chief of the United States armed forces has the authority to personally command the troops into battle. The American president has historically acted on this authority on a few rare occasions, the first of which took place during the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794 during which President Washington (at the urging of Alexander Hamilton) personally led 13,000 militiamen into western Pennsylvania to suppress an armed insurrection that began over grievances related to a national excise tax on the production of whiskey. The rebellion was quickly dissolved.⁴ The American president entered the battlefield again in August 1814, on the eve of the Burning of Washington during the War of 1812, when James Madison, mounted on horseback and armed with two pistols, rallied militia against the British. The lines immediately broke and Madison joined his militiamen and cabinet secretaries in fleeing the city; the battle was a decisive loss.⁵ While his actions were commendable, Madison evidently did not have the military expertise necessary to save Washington in its hour of need. Although it is still constitutionally possible, the modern American president has never led troops into battle, as the chain of command has since become more systematic.

Perhaps Clausewitz's views on civil-military relations are part of a deep rooted bias that stems from his past experience with rival Napoleon Bonaparte, a man who embodied the dual soldier-statesman role. Regardless, the Clausewitzian formula poses several risks to liberal society, among them being the descent into military dictatorship, as there would be no arbitrary line between the soldiers and statesmen that would otherwise act as a safety net. Cohen states

⁴ Milkis, Sidney M., and Michael Nelson. 2020. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2018*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, an imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc.), 100.

⁵ "Flight of the Madisons." WHHA (en-US). White House Historical Association. Accessed January 30, 2020. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/galleries/flight-of-the-madisons>.

that the solution is in the form of objective control and professional officership, both concepts from Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Huntington, best known for the *Clash of Civilizations* and his service on the National Security Council during the Carter Administration, argues for a clear, legal divide between civilian and military roles. Objective control, Cohen summarizes, is "a form of civilian control based on efforts to increase the professionalism of the officer corps, carving off for it a sphere of action independent of politics."⁶ Subjective control, on the other hand, implies the civilianization of the military, rendering it vulnerable to political influence and the societal elites; it denies the military of its own independent sphere, while objective control recognizes its autonomy.

In *the Soldier and the State*, Huntington puts great emphasis on military professionalism, essentially the backbone of objective control. Prior to explaining the military profession as it exists in the United States, Huntington first explores the origins of professional officership as it emerged in early 19 century Europe. Fundamentally speaking, a professional in any field of endeavor embodies three things: expertise, responsibility, and corporateness. Expertise is attained through two phases of education: the liberal phase, typically handled by institutions of general education, and the technical phase, offered by special institutions that are directly related to the profession. Responsibility comes with values and ideals that drive the profession toward a greater purpose that benefits society as a whole. Finally, corporateness implies an organic unity that collectivizes the previously mentioned expertise and social responsibility.

⁶ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 243.

Looking at the professional officer, Huntington summarizes their main area of expertise as “the management of violence,” the duties of which include “the organizing, equipping, and training of this force; the planning of its activities; and the direction of its operation in and out of combat.”⁷ Huntington clarifies that the management of violence is different from the act of violence itself, as the former area can be attained via education and experience, while the latter requires mechanical knowledge and craftsmanship. He states that the highest level of professional ability comes from the officer who is capable of conducting joint operations involving air, land, and sea. The military officer not only acknowledges the history of the profession, but also anticipates future developments with said history in mind. Finally, the professional officer’s expertise extends well beyond military affairs. He or she must have an intimate understanding of cultural patterns, human behavior, and the relation of the officer corps to the other professions.

The social responsibility of the professional officer is the security of his or her state. Huntington distinguishes the professional officer from a mercenary who lends expertise in exchange for reward or a temporary soldier who commits to a single term of service; the officer is motivated by “a technical love for his craft and the sense of social obligation to utilize this craft for the benefit of society.”⁸ This sense of responsibility is manifested through a code, which typically includes various customs and courtesies that sets the officer corps apart from civilian professionals.

Regarding the corporate character of the military professional, Huntington claims that an officer’s commission is equivalent to a doctor’s license. The corporate structure of the officer

⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. 1957. *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 13.

⁸ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 15.

corps is not just limited to bureaucracy, but also includes various societies, journals, and associations. The deep separation between the officer corps and other professionals can most aptly be symbolized by uniforms and rank insignia. Within the military organization, rank reflects professional competence and achievement. The officer corps also includes reservists, who have the required education and training but ultimately lack the experience of career professionals. While the reservist is a useful supplement to the officer corps, his or her primary profession and obligation to society exists outside of the military.

Summarizing Huntington's theory, Cohen compares military professionals to "highly trained surgeons." In this analogy, the statesman is the patient, who has the authority to choose which licensed doctors will perform the operation and/or whether or not to have the operation in the first place. Cohen notes that "even the patient who has medical training is well-advised not to do so," meaning that even a statesman with a military background (e.g. Eisenhower, Grant) would be wise to consult the current generals who are up to date and whose profession it is to fight wars tactically and strategically. The patient also has the option to hire several surgeons and/or replace them, depending on the technical expertise that the operation requires. Cohen calls this consensus the "Normal Theory of Civilian Control," which pushes for a "limited degree of civilian control over military matters."⁹ It warns against the statesman asking too many questions about tactics, personally designing campaigns, or pushing too hard for promotions or dismissals of professional officers lower in the chain of command. Such intervention is not only inappropriate, but also highly dangerous to national security.

⁹ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 5.

Cohen draws attention to the theory's "insistence on a principled, as opposed to a prudential basis for civilian restraint in interrogating, probing, and even in extremis, dictating military actions." He argues that there are times where the intervention of the statesman is necessary so that they can take full responsibility in managing the state during a time of crisis. Cohen's four case studies all feature politicians who successfully interjected and took over the reigns from their respective military counterparts. He effectively argues that statesmen make the best wartime leaders and that their historic defiance of professional military officers was not only justified, but essential. Grand strategy in its entirety encompasses far more than just tactics and maneuvers; it includes maintaining alliances, determining acceptable risk, and managing domestic affairs as they relate to foreign policy decisions, all functions that require a big-picture type of thinking. The generals simply provide the means for the statesman to achieve more complex political ends. For this reason, Cohen argues that wars cannot be handed over to generals to fight at their own discretion. Instead, there needs to be back and forth discussion between the soldier and the statesman, often resulting in the latter overruling the former if necessary. While the general has devoted his or her life to the study of war, the politician, laser-focussed on the national interest, is ultimately in the driver's seat and the subordination of all servicemembers is absolutely critical, not only for success in battle, but for the overall national interest. While the heart of the normal theory of limited civilian control still stands, Cohen argues that it should be bent in favor of the statesman whenever the state of the world requires it.

This paper will analyze a fifth case study as in order to test Cohen's theory. In 1951, an American president dismissed one of the most decorated soldiers in history. The principal

characters in this historical narrative are President Harry S. Truman, 33rd president of the United States, and Douglas MacArthur, General of the Army and Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command in Korea. Just by looking at their respective backgrounds, it is evident that both men were on a collision course before the Korean War even began. Truman, a former army officer and combat veteran of WWI, grew up an uneducated, poor Missourian who represented his state in the Senate for a decade prior to serving as vice president between January and April of 1945. With the death of President Roosevelt that same year, Truman, who had very little foreign policy experience, would become the commander-in-chief of the armed forces seemingly by accident. Although he accomplished a lot in his presidency prior to the Korean War, his public image stayed more or less the same; he was seen as a little man. MacArthur, on the other hand, was the first in his class at the United States Military Academy at West Point, a recipient of the Medal of Honor during the Philippines Campaign, and one of five people to rise to the rank of General of the Armies. In addition, he was appointed Field Marshal of the Philippine Army during the Second World War. Although his decorations and prestige were undisputed, his hubris always rubbed Truman the wrong way, who in comparison, ultimately lacked MacArthur's charisma. Truman, who believed he was doing his constitutional duty and preventing another world war, exercised his authority as a wartime commander-in-chief. Looking at MacArthur's words and actions from a critical historic lens, this paper will decide whether or not the president's display of authority was appropriate.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

The Professional Military Mind

Having established the concept of professional officership, Huntington goes on to elucidate the unique military mind, which he associates with conservative realism. Pessimistic at its core, the military ethic sees violence as an inherent biological attribute of man; it insists upon imagining the weakest version of the human race. Thus, man is dependent on organization, discipline, and leadership as natural remedies. The military ethic is anti-individualistic; professional officers forgo all personal advantages while prioritizing community. The human race is social in nature, thus “the military ethic is basically cooperative in spirit.”¹⁰ Since the military officer’s professional knowledge derives from experience, he or she is expected to study history and draw generalizations from said studies.

Huntington establishes the military officer as a fundamental realist - he or she is always in a state of insecurity and forever believes in the inevitability of war. Interstate war is immediately caused by conflicting state policies, which is simply an extension of human nature. Since human nature remains imperfect, war is thus all but guaranteed. Accepting this inevitability, the military mind does not trust international institutions aimed at preventing war. The United Nations, for example, is seen as superficial in that it is merely covering up the presence of power within its member states. Diplomacy alone can achieve very little, unless “it

¹⁰ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 64.

has the strength and the will to back up its demands with force.”¹¹ For the professional soldier, Teddy Roosevelt’s Big Stick Ideology resonates considerably.

In addition to the long term pessimism of the Huntingtonian military mind, there is a constant sense of anxiety that keeps the professional officer on guard for more immediate threats to the state. It falls on the officers to estimate these potential threats. In making these estimates, they employ what Huntington refers to as “professional bias” - a sense of professional responsibility that can often lead to the overstatement of threats or the misreport of threats altogether. Rather than assessing the intentions of other states, the professional officer only looks at the capabilities, as intentions are political in nature. Maintaining a conservative realist lens at all times, the officer does not trust any state with stronger capabilities than his or her own, regardless of intentions; “it is the military responsibility to be prepared for any eventuality.”¹² Unlike the constructivist, who engages other states with preset values and ideals, the conservative realist only considers military strength in distinguishing friends from foes.

After estimating global threats, the military mind then focuses on strengthening the forces necessary for the security of the state as a means of combating these potential threats. The professional officer always demands a higher share of the national budget that can be converted into military strength in order to meet every possible contingency. By increasing hard power, the military mind always looks to deter, rather than provoke, the possibility of war. Regarding alliances, the military mind believes that allies should be selected based on their relevance and mutuality to national security interest; weak allies are seen as a liability.

¹¹ Ibid, 66.

¹² Ibid, 67.

In working closely with the statesman, the professional officer warns the former to stay within the means of the military. Moral, ideological, and humanitarian ends should not be pursued if they hinder military security of the state, which must be the nation's top priority. It falls on the professional officer to prevent the statesman from overcommitting beyond the state's accessible means. The military mind always exercises restraint over conflict. Although preemptive and preventive war are on the table, general war is seen as a measure of last resort. The professional officer is afraid of war, as no state can be totally prepared for it. The prospect of violence and glory must be met with fear, rather than with zeal and enthusiasm; they should not simply be ends in themselves.

To maintain objective control, the professional officer must remain politically neutral. Political decisions extend "beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional competence, dividing the profession against itself, and substituting extraneous values for professional values."¹³ As Clausewitz originally conceived, the military always meets the ends of state policy; in order for it to do so effectively, it must be an autonomous profession. Politics is a developing and ever-changing entity, often pitting like minded men and women against one another; the professional officer corps is constant, always united in tradition and military values. Huntington makes the noteworthy distinction between the professional officer and what he calls the temporary "citizen soldier," typically an enlisted man motivated by economic benefits of service or their own momentary patriotic desires. Citing the United States Marine Corps and the French Foreign Legion as examples of impartial competence, he argues that "the professional

¹³ Ibid, 71.

army which fights well because it is its job to fight well is far more reliable than the political army which fights well only while sustained by a higher purpose.”¹⁴ In a volunteer force, it falls on the career officers to stay mission-focused at all times and push their enlisted subordinates to do the same during the latter group’s temporary service.

According to Huntington, the soldier has three different responsibilities to the state: representation, assessment, and implementation. It falls on the professional officer to communicate the needs of the military to the state in the context of security. Second, the officer must act as an advisor for state policies, assess the risks associated with said policies, and ultimately determine whether or not the state’s goals are realistic, given its military capabilities. Finally, the officer is responsible for implementing all state decisions on an operational level, regardless of military judgement; orders from above must be carried out. Hence, the profession can perform its function if, and only if, there is unfailing and absolute loyalty of subordinates throughout the chain of command. Huntington argues that without this loyal obedience from the bottom-up, military professionalism is impossible. For the subordinate, the cause, whether right or wrong, is out of sight.

Perhaps the greatest internal conflict within the professional military mind is remaining obedient to the chain of command while simultaneously acting with professional competence. This conflict comes in two forms: operational and doctrinal. Regarding the former, disobedience is typically unacceptable, as the subordinate must always assume greater knowledge and competence of the superior. On some rare occasions, the subordinate may have greater technical knowledge of the object at hand. In this case, disobedience can be justified, as there are often

¹⁴ Ibid, 74.

specific circumstances on the micro level that are overlooked by the superior. Huntington claims that doctrinal conflict usually occurs when a superior officer is out of touch with modern, progressive developments of the military (i.e., a 21st century general who prefers an excess supply of horses, bayonets, and tear gas over drones and stealth warfare). He argues that in cases like these, justified disobedience is conditional; if it increases military efficiency “as to offset the impairment of that efficiency caused by the disruption of the chain of command,”¹⁵ it (disobedience) is therefore better for the mission in the long run. In the end, professional competence is the highest priority.

Military obedience is also tested when pitted against nonmilitary values. The professional officer must grapple with assumed political wisdom, legality, and ethics when deciding whether or not to obey orders. The military mind is limited in that it must accept the political wisdom of the statesman as fact. While the professional officer may have his or her own thoughts on war and peace, which they are encouraged to share, they must be willing to back down if the statesman does not agree. Tactically speaking, however, professional standards legitimize disobedience; the statesman is in no place to decide “whether battalions in combat should advance or retreat, as Hitler did in the later phases of World War II.”¹⁶ Regarding questions of legality and ethics, there is always an assumption of validity for the opinions of the statesman. Conscience does not belong in the professional military mind, as disobedience based on morals alone is not only insubordinate to the chain of command, but also irresponsible for the welfare of the state.

¹⁵ Ibid, 76.

¹⁶ Ibid, 78.

There is a broader conflict in civil-military relations: that which exists between the professional military ethic and political ideology. While the military mind is constant and universal, the civilian ethic varies. Political ideology (including, but not limited to liberalism, conservatism, facsism, and marxism) represents the exemplification of these civilian ethics, some of which align better with the military ethic than others. To resolve issues of compatibility between political ideology and military professionalism, Huntington emphasizes the importance of finding middle ground, suggesting that “the realization of objective civilian control depends upon the achievement of an appropriate equilibrium between the power of the military and the ideology of society.”¹⁷ Of the four ideologies mentioned above, conservatism stands almost directly in line with the military ethic, sharing its realist approach to grand strategy. Liberalism, on the other hand, is the least compatible ideology with the military ethic, thus making equilibrium more difficult to achieve.

Individualism, Huntington reminds us, is the nucleus of the liberal ideology. While the military ethic, rooted in Hobbes, maintains that man is inherently evil and must submit to a larger group to succeed, liberalism suggests that peace and harmony are both intrinsic to human nature and that “success in any enterprise depends on the maximum release of individual energies,”¹⁸ rather than collective spirit. Unlike the military mind, which learns from experience and studies history, the liberal takes counsel from human reason when solving problems. Regarding grand strategy, the liberal feels a sense of security from the economic welfare of a state and the institutional devices of the global community, such as international courts, laws, and organizations; the realist military mind does not feel safe under any circumstances. Predictably,

¹⁷ Ibid, 94.

¹⁸ Ibid, 90.

liberalism has pacifist tendencies when it comes to war, unless said war is fought for a liberal cause “on behalf of universally true principles of justice and freedom.”¹⁹ While the military mind relies on armaments and standing armies, the liberal opts for militia and short term citizen-soldiers, unprofessional in nature. According to liberalism, the military organization must embody liberal ideas as its core values; this makes the military mind inevitably subjective.

The United States, being a liberal democratic society, has often experienced difficulties with its own professional military establishment. Jeffersonian in nature, the American liberal mind has embraced economic expansion and international isolation. The professional military officer is seen by the average liberal American as “a warmonger, plotting to bring out conflicts as to enhance his own rank and power”²⁰ Small standing armies are viewed favorably compared to large military forces, the latter being seen as a threat to liberty, democracy, economic success, and peace. Although it is pacifist in nature, American liberal society is Wilsonian in the sense that it is prepared for the state to engage in wars fought for universal democratic principles; to them, war is like a crusade. Despite the liberal hostility toward the military, electoral politics has overseen several military heroes nominated to be commander in chief. Most of them, however, were temporary citizen-soldiers who displayed heroism on the battlefield; only three American presidents were professional officers.²¹ In a time of war, Huntington suggests there are two ways for a liberal society to gain the upper hand: either become more conservative, or wait for the enemy to lose power. The conflict that Huntington identifies between the conservative American military and the state’s democratic liberal society continues to be a political debate well into the 21st century.

¹⁹ Ibid, 91.

²⁰ Ibid, 153.

²¹ Ibid, 159.

Origins of Military Professionalism and its Emergence in the United States

The empirical record of military professionalism suggests that a professional officer corps of any nationality did not exist until the early 19th century, starting in Prussia, France, and Great Britain. Prior to 1800, armies were led by either mercenaries or aristocrats, the former viewing it as a business and the latter as an adventure; neither group was professional in nature. An individualist and entrepreneur at heart, the mercenary has no standards. Although the system reached its peak during the Thirty-Years War (1618-1648), the mercenary officer corps continued into the Revolutionary War and up until the early days of professionalism on a smaller, case-by-case basis.

The mercenary system was replaced by the aristocratic officer corps, seen by monarchs as a tool to consolidate their power and gain “permanent military forces to protect their dominions and to support their rule.”²² Loyal to the crown, the aristocratic officer became subject to national control rather than private control, a big step toward professionalism. The system, however, lacked objective control. Advancement in the corps was ultimately determined by wealth, birth, and political influence. In Britain, for example, officers typically also served in parliament, opening the door to royal pressure. For the most part, the aristocracy believed that the only prerequisites for the officer corps were honor and courage, attributes they believed to be obtained at birth. As a result, institutional military education was insufficient in Europe, merely consisting of noble academies and technical schools for artillery and engineers. The officers produced by said institutions were amateurs, often abandoning military responsibility via mutiny, desertion,

²² Ibid, 21.

and in the case of Prussia, enriching themselves with royal treasury money. In essence, Europe did not consider military science as a particular branch of knowledge, as the officers produced prior to 1800 could be characterized by their loyalty, rather than their professionalism.

While thinkers of the Enlightenment believed in the “natural genius” theory, that officers were born with superior ability, they did not consider the idea of producing officers through an objective lens via social institutions. Prussia saw through the natural genius theory, assuming it to be superfluous. Instead, they believed officers were made up of common men with superior education and invaluable experience.²³ Huntington designates August 6th, 1808, as the date of origin for the military profession. This was when the Prussian government issued the following decree:

The only title to an officer’s commission shall be, in time of peace, education and professional knowledge; in time of war, distinguished valor and perception. For the entire nation, therefore, all individuals who possess these qualities are eligible for the highest military posts. All previously existing class preference in the military establishment is abolished, and every man, without regard to his origins, has equal duties and equal rights.²⁴

Just like that, entry to the officer corps was accessible to anyone, and advancement within the corps was merit-based. Clausewitz, who was a Prussian cavalry officer, established the theoretical framework on professionalism during his 40 years of service. Simultaneously, Prussia developed universal service as a societal norm. Beginning in September of 1814, every Prussian subject was required to serve three years active duty and two years in the reserves. In transitioning from long-term regulars to amateur soldiers, the Prussian enlisted force became bigger and more capable - too difficult a task for aristocratic officers to manage and properly train. For this reason, the professional officer corps needed to take over by advancing military

²³ Ibid, 51.

²⁴ Ibid, 31.

technique and training the increasing volume of enlisted soldiers. The conscripted soldiers needed professional officers as a balancing influence with the calculating expertise needed to divert Prussia's newly increased military power away from "total war and bloody national strife of unlimited ferocity."²⁵

Huntington cites several factors for why Prussia, in particular, was the nation to take the lead on professionalism. First, Prussia had the social conditions (i.e. large population, industrial growth, urbanism, etc.) necessary for technological specialization. These conditions allowed for military science to be broken down and specialized into its own division. Second, Prussia was developing as a nation state and thus began competing with its neighbors; military security was suddenly a priority, and a professional officer corps was the only way to reach it. The Kingdom's earlier defeat by Napoleon prompted them to react and push for stronger security. Third, Prussian society was ideologically conflicted. While the aristocracy remained going into the 19th century, liberal ideas also became a powerful ideological force, as the Stein-Hardenberg Reforms of 1807 suggest. Both the aristocrats and the reformers wanted to regulate the officer commission process in their favor. A professional military body, autonomous from politics, was therefore the only feasible solution that would satisfy both ideological factions. The final factor that led to professional growth in Prussia was constitutional consensus that took the form of recognizing "the king as Supreme War Lord and sole authority on military matters."²⁶ Although France and Britain followed in Prussia's footsteps during the same century, the latter country, having the perfect conditions necessary for professional military growth, pioneered the systematic approach to officership and set the model for others to follow.

²⁵ Ibid, 39.

²⁶ Ibid, 36.

The Prussian Kingdom continued to pave the way in respect to military education, advancement, and professional spirit. Future officers were required to have a general education and basic professional competence. Additionally, Prussia no longer made aristocracy a prerequisite for entry to the corps. Once commissioned, an officer needed to take exams in order to be promoted, something that had formerly been determined by seniority. Once promoted, the officer would see an increase in pay. After five years of service and a recommendation from their commander, the Prussian officer became eligible for admittance to *Kriegsakademie*, the War Academie. Attendance of the Academie opened the door to positions in General Staff. Finally, the Prussian officer corps was united over a sense of camaraderie. Having similar backgrounds and relatable experiences, they collectively created a military caste spirit.

The Prussian model of professionalism was not implemented in the United States until after the Civil War. The U.S. did adopt a form of normal civilian control prior to this point, as explained in the Federalist Papers, which state that

The President is to be commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States. In this respect his authority would be nominally the same with that of the king of Great Britain, but in substance much inferior to it. It would amount to nothing more than the supreme command and direction of the military and naval forces, as first General and admiral of the Confederacy; while that of the British king extends to the declaring of war and to the raising and regulating of fleets and armies, all which, by the Constitution under consideration, would appertain to the legislature.²⁷

In the days of Hamilton, the American military was made up of militiamen, undisciplined and social in nature, rather than professional. Although the United States Military Academy at West Point was founded in 1802 under President Thomas Jefferson, American military education was mainly technical, with little emphasis on the liberal arts. While the Jeffersonians pushed for

²⁷Hamilton, Alexander. "The Federalist Papers No. 69." The Avalon Project : Federalist No 69. *Lillian Golden Law Library*, 2008. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed69.asp.

technicism, the Jacksonians merely believed in military enthusiasm as the only prerequisite to officership. As evidenced by the theoretical influence of thinkers like Dennis Hart Mahan (father of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the theorist of seapower) and the proposed policies of several individuals, notably Secretary of War John Calhoun, the question of military professionalism was being considered in America at the same time as its European counterparts. The question did not get answered until decades later.²⁸

Following the Southern defeat in 1865, after 600,000 battlefield deaths, the United States embraced the ideals of business pacifism, a liberal philosophy that values economic productivity while condemning war, considering it to be destructive to economic wealth. Believing war to be obsolete, the business pacifist pitted militarism against industrialism, arguing that the two are mutually exclusive. This new perspective was reflected in the rapidly decreasing federal military budget following the Civil War; the armed services were physically isolated, morally rejected, and significantly reduced. This isolation, however, provided autonomy, and thus paved the way for professionalism to emerge in the United States. Unlike the European tradition, which saw professionalism develop as a reaction to conditions, American professionalism was the product of a select group of military officers, including Commanding General of the Army William Sherman, General Emory Upton, and Rear Admiral Stephen Luce, all of whom created the foundation of the American professional officer corps. Huntington singles out Sherman and credits him with starting the tradition of political neutrality, a key component of objective control. The beginning of the professional corps was “the reaction of an inherently conservative group against a liberal society, rather than the product of a general conservative reform

²⁸ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 215.

movement within society.”²⁹ The reformers acted in isolation, without the knowledge of the American civilian society. Looking closely at the Prussian model, these men got to work immediately, pushing for a general staff corps, advanced military schools, a vertical system of performance reports, examinations as prerequisite to promotion, and a retirement program.

Perhaps the most significant step in professionalization was the reformation of military education. The first step in doing this was the replacement of technicism with the liberal arts. This succeeded when West Point relinquished its control of the Corps of Engineers in 1866. That same year, the Army established a post-graduate Engineer School at Willets Point, New York, an action representative of a larger effort to establish West Point and the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis as a basic undergraduate military education, while designating specialized post-graduate schools as institutions for advanced technical instruction. Finally, the reformers pushed for establishing advanced schools dedicated entirely to the study of war, namely the Naval War College and the Army War College, founded in 1884 and 1901, respectively.³⁰

By the First World War, both the army and the navy had a strong professional foundation, achieving most of what the reformers had set out to accomplish. This new professional corps eventually began to think of war as a science, as seen in the articles and books written by American officers during the post-Civil War period. The United States had gradually developed a professional military ethic that closely mirrored that of Prussia. Embodying conservative values, the American officer became further at odds with liberal society, cementing the line that had been drawn by business pacifism. American officers were loyal to the chain of

²⁹ Ibid, 233.

³⁰ Ibid, 241.

command, but privately feared democratic government and its implications on the developing military profession, as “the fundamental characteristics of American government made it impossible to discipline an effective army from the point of view of military experts.”³¹ The post-1865 civil- military divide helped set the collision course between the general and the president that would take place a century later.

³¹ Ibid, 260.

Chapter Two: Civil-Military Crisis, Resolution, and Aftermath

Buildup to the Korean War

Protruding out like a thumb from Asia's northeast coast, the Korean Peninsula has been historically vulnerable to influence and invasion from the nearby superpowers of the Far East. China's involvement with the region goes back two millennia, initially playing a role in Korea's unification. In the centuries that followed, the relationship between Korea and China was obsequious in order to preserve the former's independence. This relationship, however, did not guarantee security, as Korea still suffered over 900 invasions during these two millennia, mainly at the hands of the Mongols, Manchus, and Japanese.³² The 19th and 20th centuries saw several shifts in the balance of power between Korea's three strongest neighbors: China, Russia, and Japan. Following China's defeat during the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894, Russia became the new protector of Korea's autonomy. This lasted a decade until yet another war broke out, this time between Russia and Japan. The war was mediated by the United States, which was beginning to take a more active role in foreign affairs. After decisive victories over the Russians at Inchon and Port Arthur, Japan occupied and eventually annexed the Korean Peninsula.

³² Roll, David L. 2019. *George Marshall: Defender of the Republic*. (New York, NY: Dutton Caliber), 553.

For the next 35 years, Japan enforced a brutal colonial government aimed at exploiting resources and suppressing Korean identity. Although the Koreans attempted to resist, their efforts were dampened by the politics of factionism. In the years before and after their eventual liberation, Korea's politics were divided between Marxist-Leninism/Chinese Communism and Western liberal ideas/Confucianism. These left and right factions were further divided amongst themselves; Korea had a weak foundation for resistance and/or transition should said resistance be successful. The aftermath of the first World War did inspire Wilsonian expressions of self-determination within occupied Korea. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Revolution encouraged communist movements and guerilla campaigns amongst Korean exiles in Manchuria and Siberia. These efforts, both at home and abroad, however, lacked organization and international backing. China and Russia were both preoccupied with foreign affairs and were too weak to lend their support effectively, while the more powerful United States stood idly by out of concern for commercial interests in Japan, as well as its hold on the Philippines. Geographically, Japan's close proximity to the Korean Peninsula made its grip even tighter. All of these factors rendered Korea's chances of success to be improbable, which deterred the Koreans from further resistance and "created frustrations within its ranks and reinforced its tendency toward factionalism."³³

Following the Second World War, American policymakers agreed that the aggression of the three Axis powers during the 1930's could have been prevented had the U.S. secured a more active role in the international community. With Japanese resistance collapsing at the close of the war, the United States shifted its focus toward the Korean Peninsula in the post-war period. Concerned over the failure of the weak and disorganized Chinese Nationalist government to

³³ Stueck, William, Jack L. Snyder, John Lewis Gaddis and Richard H. Ullman. 1997. *The Korean War: an International History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 17.

become the new policeman of the Far East, the United States, now under President Truman's leadership, accepted that its involvement was necessary to contain Soviet expansion. On August 8th, 1945, near the end of the war, the Soviet Union opportunistically declared war on Japan, moving into Manchuria and northern Korea.³⁴ With British forces preoccupied with Southeast Asia and Nationalist China trying to reoccupy territory from the Japanese, only the United States could block the Red Army advances.

As the United States prepared to land troops in southern Korea, Army Colonel and soon-to-be Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Dean Rusk (who would later become President Kennedy's Secretary of State) recommended the 38th parallel as the east-west line that would divide the peninsula into North and South Korea as a way of separating U.S. and Soviet occupation zones. Under this arrangement, the Soviet Union would occupy the industrial north, giving its Far Eastern border a key buffer zone. In addition, the north would give the Soviets access to warm water ports, a huge boost to their hydroelectric industry. The United States would occupy the rural, more populous south, which included the capital Seoul, considered by Rusk to be strategically significant for the U.S. Although the recommendation seemed to favor the United States, Soviet premier Joseph Stalin readily agreed without hesitation; this was something that "rested primarily on military conditions in Korea combined with uncertainty regarding U.S. intentions."³⁵ With American troops mobilized and ready, Stalin preferred to pick his battles and concede over what he saw as a minor issue. Longing for independence, the Koreans on both sides were euphoric over the arrangement. As of 2020, the

³⁴ Ibid, 18.

³⁵ Stueck, *the Korean War*, 19.

38th parallel is marked by a 2.5 mile strip of stateless territory, commonly known as the demilitarized zone (DMZ), marking the divider between North and South Korea.³⁶

Under the leadership of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, the United States occupation of the south began in September 1945. Although he replaced the Japanese governor and police chief with Americans, Hodge maintained the bureaucratic government model that the Japanese had previously used. He also actively discouraged the “People’s Republic,” a left wing self-proclaimed government which had already received significant nationwide support and is considered to be “the most promising effort at national cohesion in Korea’s recent history.”³⁷ In his efforts to undermine the left and maintain general order, Hodge recruited Syngman Rhee, former President of the Shanghai-based Provincial Government of the Republic of Korea during the Japanese occupation. Returning from exile, Rhee united the factions on the Right and rejected the People’s Republic, thus putting national unification out of reach. Meanwhile, in the north, Soviet authorities were much more relaxed in their governance, ideologically speaking. While they were strict on economic interaction between the north and the south, they were passive in allowing non-Communists and domestic Communists to participate in government activity. By October, the Soviets sponsored the North Korean Communist Party, which was to be chaired by Kim Il-sung, a former anti-Japanese guerrilla, who also served as an officer in the Soviet Red Army. In February of the following year, Kim, still subordinate to the Soviets, was appointed as the leader of the Provisional People's Committee for North Korea, a governmental role he held in addition to his post as party leader.³⁸

³⁶ Roll, *George Marshall*, 554.

³⁷ Stueck, *the Korean War*, 21.

³⁸ Lankov, Andrei. “Terenti Shtykov: the Other Ruler of Nascent N. Korea.” *The Korea Times*, April 17, 2015. https://web.archive.org/web/20150417010008/http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/01/363_103451.html.

In September of 1947, the Soviets proposed the withdrawal of Red Army troops in the north if the United States mirrored this move in the South. Believing U.S. military presence in the south to bear little strategic value, American defense officials agreed; within the next two years, the majority of troops from both great powers pulled out of the peninsula.³⁹ As U.S-Soviet relations deteriorated, the United States, seeking help from the international community, chose to advance the bilateral issue of Korean governance into a multilateral one. This resulted in the creation of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK). Intending to unite the entire peninsula, the commission proposed free elections, which were foreseeably boycotted in the north. Elections in the south occurred in May of 1948 and Rhee became the first President of the newly established Republic of Korea (ROK). Three months later, the north established the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and appointed Kim as premier. In both of their respective inaugural addresses, the two leaders claimed jurisdiction of the entire peninsula and pledged to unite it. Governed by vehemently opposing ideologies, the north and south could no longer be united through peaceful means.⁴⁰

Still plagued by factionalism, Rhee's leadership was resisted by many in the south, typically land-holders. With his administration failing to represent the entirety of the party that elected him, Rhee found himself at odds with the legislative branch of the ROK. Militarily, the south could not compete against the north.⁴¹ Although the United States left 500 military advisers on site, it rejected Rhee's requests for aircraft and tanks, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the American armed forces feared that he would invade the north. In addition, funding in the United States was spread very thin due to the nation's commitments to Europe, which was a higher

³⁹ Roll, *George Marshall*, 555.

⁴⁰ Stueck, *The Korean War*, 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 28.

priority than the peninsula and the Far East as a whole. The Koreans in the north were in much better shape. While ideological factionism still existed, it did not disrupt internal order. More importantly, the north's military capabilities surpassed its southern counterpart significantly. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) consisted of 135,000 men, many of whom were veterans of China's campaign against Nationalist forces. NKPA forces also included 150 T-34 tanks from the Soviets.^{42,43} While both the north and south had the same desired military ends, only the north had the means to get there.

Following the full evacuation of U.S. troops, Kim began aggressively lobbying for a southward military move, claiming "I do not sleep at night, thinking about unification."⁴⁴ He also grew increasingly anxious about the ROK's relationship with Japan, former occupier of the peninsula. With growing diplomatic and economic interaction between the two entities, Kim recognized that the window for southward attack was small. After a failed guerilla campaign, Kim sought approval from his communist allies for a more overt offensive. Stalin, who envisioned a "second front" for communist expansion that would divert western attention away from Europe, saw Korea as a staging point. In his calculation, Stalin observed the United States' prior refusal to prevent a communist victory in China's civil war as well as its abandonment of Taiwan, which faced violent aggression from the same red forces.⁴⁵ This, combined with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson's public declaration that the American "defensive perimeter" did not include Korea, brought Stalin to the conclusion that the United States would likely not respond militarily to a North Korean offensive. In January 1950, Stalin gave Kim the green light

⁴² Ibid, 29.

⁴³ Roll, *George Marshall*, 555.

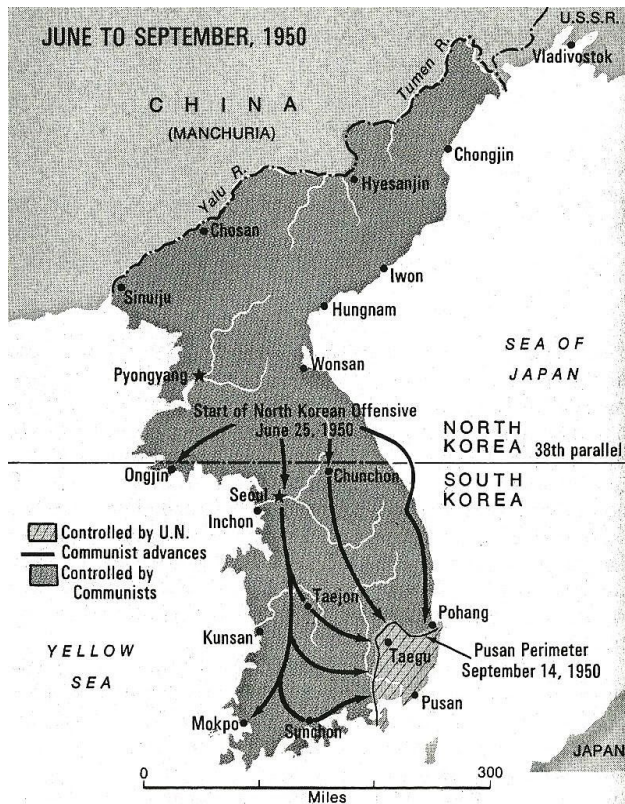
⁴⁴ Stueck, *The Korean War*, 31.

⁴⁵ Stueck, *The Korean War*, 35.

for attack.⁴⁶ Mao Zedong of China, loyal to the revolutionary, anti-imperialist cause, also conveyed his general approval.

On June 25th, 1950, at 3:30 AM, Captain Joseph Darigo, a military advisor to the ROK, was awakened by the sound of artillery fire. North Korea had sent 10,000 men, 180 tanks, and 100 Soviet aircraft across the 38th Parallel; Darigo “knew right away that this was no minor border skirmish.”⁴⁷

A Police Action



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⁴⁶ Roll, *George Marshall*, 556.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Kaufman, Burton I. 1986. *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP.

President Truman and Secretary Acheson were both on holiday when the news reached the United States. Acheson had several questions on his mind: what did the attack imply for the Cold War? What did the Soviets want out of it? Most importantly, he wondered how forceful the U.S response should be.⁴⁹ His January 12th National Press Club speech that declared Korea outside the United States' "defensive perimeter" was still accurate from a military standpoint; if Washington tried to settle the issue in Korea on military grounds, it would not have opted for intervention. American security would not have been any more at risk if the Republic of Korea, as a geographical entity, fell into red communist hands. From a political perspective, however, much more was at stake, as American security was ultimately threatened not by "the possible conquest of South Korea, but the conquest of millions of minds throughout the world,"⁵⁰ should the entire peninsula turn red. If the North Koreans went unchallenged, the Soviet Union and their ideology would be seen as triumphantly invincible, while the United States would be seen as a powerful actor that failed to act; its big talk would not have been supported by force. The United States had previously risen to the occasion in Turkey and Greece at which time Truman declared that aggression cannot go unanswered. American resolve needed to be consistent, hence why Acheson made the case that Korea was no less significant than the European front. Due to Korea's close proximity to U.S.-occupied Japan, it was seen by many in Washington as *more vital*. Acheson and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Omar Bradley both called for a vigorous response, suggesting that General MacArthur, commander of the U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, send weapons from Japan to the ROK Army as a necessary first step.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Brands, H.W. 2017. *The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War*. (New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group), 75.

⁵⁰ Schlesinger, Arthur M., and Richard H. Rovere. 1952. *The General and the President: General Douglas MacArthur and President Truman: and the Future of American Foreign Policy*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann), 100.

⁵¹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 77.

While the United States was ready to defend its credibility, Truman's decision was facilitated by the international community. Up until this point, the United Nations had been in what Secretary General Trygve Lie declared to be a "total stalemate," mainly due to the Soviet Union's veto power on the Security Council.⁵² Truman eventually saw an opening after the communist victory over the nationalists in China. The United States did not recognize China's new government and blocked Beijing's envoy to the U.N., prompting the Soviets to boycott the security council in response.⁵³ Without the Soviet veto in play, the security council was temporarily cured of its paralysis at the time of the North Korean advance. This resulted in U.N. Resolution 82, which called upon "all Member States to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution and to refrain from giving assistance to the North Korean authorities."⁵⁴ With support from the United States, the United Kingdom, the Republic of China (to clarify, this seat belonged to the nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan during the martial law period, not the red Chinese mainland under Mao Zedong's leadership), France, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Norway, and India, the resolution represented a multilateral effort to condemn communist aggression. Adopted two days later, Resolution 83 "recommended "that the Members of the United Nations 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,"⁵⁵ indicating that the free world, led by the United States, was prepared to stand on principle and take the Cold War to the battlefield for the first time.

⁵² Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 102.

⁵³ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 77.

⁵⁴ *UN Resolution 82. Complaint of aggression upon the Republic of Korea*. June 25, 1950. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/82>.

⁵⁵ *UN Resolution 83. Complaint of aggression upon the Republic of Korea*. June 27, 1950. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/83>.

These resolutions aligned perfectly with the strategic interests of the United States and of Truman himself. By aiding South Korea, the United States could accomplish two things: oppose communist aggression and test drive the United Nations as a provider of collective security. For Truman, the latter objective was personal; he sought to finish what his predecessor had started. In order to fulfill the promise of FDR, Truman needed to secure the U.N. as a rallying point for the energies and capabilities of the free world.⁵⁶ Korea was the perfect opportunity to put the international community to the test and draw a line multilaterally, as the consensus in Washington was that the risk of escalation with the Soviet Union was low.

The United States began the intervention cautiously. Washington had no intention to commit to Korea long term, hoping to avoid any involvement that would lead to either a baited trap or a lost cause. On June 29th, Emphasizing the collective security, Acheson told the American Newspaper Guild that “all actions taken by the United States to restore the peace in Korea have been under the aegis of the United Nations.”⁵⁷ That same day, Truman described the intervention as a “police action” and made it clear that “we are not at war.”⁵⁸ Acheson and General Bradley both recommended the use of American warplanes, the latter believing they would have a great morale effect on the ROK forces. Bradley also advised against sending American ground forces to South Korea, citing the reduced troop strength following WWII.⁵⁹

Before receiving authorization, MacArthur had already begun shipping mortars and artillery, while making F-51 aircraft available for South Korean pilots to take from Japan. Upon

⁵⁶ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 77.

⁵⁷ *Statements by Acheson*. July 10, 1950. Office of Senate Minority Policy Committee (1951). State Department Bulletin, pp. 43-46. West Point Library Special Collections.

⁵⁸ *Statements by Truman*. June 30, 1950. Office of Senate Minority Policy Committee (1951). New York Times. West Point Library Special Collections.

⁵⁹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 79.

receiving the authorization, MacArthur sent additional F-80 and B-29 aircraft, the latter of which he would eventually use to bomb North Korea, also without authorization.⁶⁰ Although these measures were promising, their deterrent effect was weak, as the North Koreans continued their advance.

Keeping a watchful eye on China and the global implications of the U.N. intervention, Truman also ordered the Seventh Fleet to patrol the Formosa Strait (the historic name for the Taiwanese Strait) and establish a barrier between the Chinese communist forces of the mainland and the exiled Chinese Nationalists on the island fortress Formosa (modern Taiwan), led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. With U.S forces now focused on the Korean peninsula, Formosa became more strategically valuable to enemies of the United States. The loss of Formosa to any communist or anti-American hostile power could have potentially hindered U.S. counteroffensive operations in Japan and the Philippines. The desired end of the fleet's repositioning was neutralization - neither party attacks the other,⁶¹ which was essential for maintaining peace in the Pacific region while Korea was being resolved. Truman's decision to move the fleet was calculated, considering not only military factors, but also political ones, both domestic and international. Back at home, the Republican faction of the U.S. Congress saw Formosa as a beacon of freedom and the Chinese Nationalists as the underdogs against the red Chinese mainland. At the same time, U.S. allies were skeptical of Chiang, seeing the "Nationalist government on Formosa as a distinctively shady proposition."⁶² For this reason, the neutralization of Formosa was an opportunity to satisfy the pro-Chiang Republican Party while at the same time maintaining defensive alliances. In response, Chiang offered to assist in the

⁶⁰ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 104.

⁶¹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 81.

⁶² Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 124.

struggle against Korea. The United States (MacArthur included) declined the offer, concerned that the nationalist troops were unpredictable and that their presence would cost the Korean intervention sympathy from other nations, many of which were disaffected by the nationalist government.

Kim's forces reached Seoul by the second day of fighting, forcing President Rhee and his staff to flee the capital. Truman approved Acheson's request to lift restrictions on American airpower south of the 38th Parallel, allowing U.S. planes to directly engage North Korean planes and ground units. By June 27th, however, Seoul had fallen without a fight. Two days later, MacArthur landed on the Suwon airstrip under enemy fire to meet with Rhee and inspect the damage. Observing the South Korean troops in action, MacArthur noted a lack of cohesion, leadership, and combat experience. He also perceived a "high national spirit and firm belief in the Americans."⁶³ These observations, combined with the overall ineffective U.S. air and naval support, prompted the general to conclude that the only way to effectively counter the communist forces was through the introduction of American ground troops. MacArthur reported his findings to Army Secretary Frank Pace, who then summarized them to Truman. Without hesitation, the president instructed Pace to assemble a regimental combat team, made up of two divisions, as per MacArthur's request. It should also be noted that Truman did not seek congressional approval for ground forces, as he and Acheson both agreed that congressional hearings would have caused more harm than good in relation to troop morale overseas and unity at home.⁶⁴ Just like with the prior shipments of aircraft and supplies, MacArthur had already ordered the bombing of North Korea and the dispatch of ground troops prior to receiving the full

⁶³ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 95.

⁶⁴ Acheson, Dean. 1969. *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton), 415.

authorization from Washington. Although his actions were generally in line with U.S. policy, they did not go unnoticed by Truman, who was already growing uneasy with the Far East commander as his subordinate.⁶⁵

The immediate objective of American ground troops on the peninsula was to slow the North Korean forces long enough for reinforcements to arrive. MacArthur aimed to establish a defensive perimeter in the Pusan neighborhood (see map above). The first contingent sent into action consisted of two rifle companies, one mortar platoon, and four 105-millimeter anti-tank guns. MacArthur also drafted several South Korean males to fight with the American divisions, the latter of which was exclusively made up of Japanese occupation forces; by that September, there was not a single organized company of American soldiers left in Japan.⁶⁶

These light units, however, were no match for the heavily armored Soviet tanks that were gifted to Kim. Despite their disadvantages, the U.S. divisions put up a resistance long enough to delay the enemy's charge toward Pusan, costing the North Koreans valuable time at the Han River (the U-shaped river branching out of Seoul). In MacArthur's summary of events that he would later send to Truman, he commended the ground troops, whose holding actions "forced the enemy into continued deployments, costly frontal attacks and confused logistics which slowed his advance and blunted his drive that we have bought the precious time necessary to build a secure base."⁶⁷ By mid-July, MacArthur brought in the remainder of the 24th Infantry Division from Japan, under the command of Brigadier General William Dean, who was instructed to further delay the North Koreans until the 25th Infantry and First Cavalry Divisions could arrive in Pusan to form a line of battle and set up a beachhead. General Dean took his last

⁶⁵ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 106.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 115.

⁶⁷ MacArthur, Douglas. *Letter to Truman*. July 19, 1950. Truman Library.

stand at the more gruesome Battle of Taejon, which took place just 130 miles north of Pusan. With over 900 casualties and an additional 2,400 missing in action (including Dean, who was captured and detained in Pyongyang as a POW), the 24th Division held the city a day longer than it had been ordered to, giving the reinforcements from Japan enough time to set up a beachhead of 140 square miles. By the beginning of September, United Nations forces, consisting of British, French, Dutch, Australian, Philippine, and Turkish troops, had arrived and fortified at Pusan along with the remaining American and ROK forces, giving MacArthur, now Commander in Chief of the U.N. Command, necessary time to plan his counter-operation.⁶⁸

Tensions Emerge

Before the counteroffensive began, there was already friction between MacArthur and Washington regarding Formosa policy. At the request of the Joint Chiefs of staff, who feared a Chinese invasion of Formosa, Truman sent the general to the island to survey the situation for two days, starting on July 31st. Merely describing his visit as “a short reconnaissance of the potential of its (the island’s) defense against possible attack,”⁶⁹ MacArthur did more than just survey the island; to Truman and his staff, the general’s description was an understatement. MacArthur personally met with Chiang Kai-Shek (referred to by the general as “my old comrade in arms”), who just weeks prior had stated that “no difficulties... will arise if United States relationships are placed in the hands of Douglas MacArthur.”⁷⁰ Washington was further put off by the Generalissimo’s statement immediately following the trip. Pleased with MacArthur’s

⁶⁸ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 116-117.

⁶⁹ MacArthur, Douglas. *General MacArthur’s Statement on his Trip to Formosa*. New York Times. August 1, 1950. Truman Library.

⁷⁰ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 126.

visit, Chiang said “an agreement was reached between General MacArthur and myself and all the problems discussed. The foundation for a joint defense of Formosa and for Sino-American military cooperation has thus been laid. It is our conviction that our struggle against communist aggression will certainly result in final victory.”⁷¹ This statement gave the world the wrong impression of what the U.S. Formosa policy was; it did not call for joint defense of the island, as Chiang seemed to suggest. MacArthur, who insisted that his meeting with Chiang was strictly limited to military matters and that there was no discussion of anything political (i.e., the Chinese government or the developments on the Chinese mainland),⁷² neither supported nor disputed the statement. Although the statement came from Chiang, Washington was alarmed over what else might have been discussed at his meeting with the general that the latter was hiding.

By mid-August, MacArthur began to test the boundaries of policy with a statement of his own that was to be read at the annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, held in Chicago. Although he began the message by thanking the veterans for their service, he took things in a more political direction by speaking against the U.S. neutralization policy, declaring that the island was “ideally located to accomplish offensive strategy and at the same time checkmate defensive or counteroffensive by friendly forces based in Okinawa and Japan.” He then took aim at the State Department and the use of diplomacy in deciding the fate of Formosa, stating that “nothing could be more fallacious than the threadbare argument... that if we defend Formosa we alienate continental China. Those who speak thus do not understand the Orient. They do not grasp that it is the pattern of Oriental psychology to respect and follow aggressive,

⁷¹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 95.

⁷² Whitney, Courtney. 1955. *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf), 375.

resolute, and dynamic leadership.”⁷³ The statement was leaked to the press, guaranteeing its publication in all major newspapers.

Had MacArthur’s message been taken seriously as an authoritative U.S. statement, it would have significantly impacted American foreign relations in several different ways, according to the State Department. These possible impacts are summarized below:

1. It would have complicated the handling of the Formosa question at the United Nations, as friendly nations such as the United Kingdom and India would have been reluctant to back up any U.S.-proposed solution that wasn’t purely strategic.
2. The statement, relative to MacArthur’s position as commander of U.N and U.S forces in Korea, would have established a connection between the Korea question and the Formosa question, respective U.N. and U.S. issues. Truman had been struggling to keep these questions separate.
3. It would have given the Soviet Union a handle for the communist argument. Due to the imperialist implications of MacArthur’s statement, the Soviets could have utilized propaganda campaigns to rally the Asian countries that were sensitive to the presence of American forces in Asia and skeptical of U.S. ambitions.
4. The Soviets would have also read the statement as an opportunity to further pressure the Chinese communists to attack Formosa.
5. At the same time, The Chinese Nationalist government would have likely taken its own position and U.S. policy for granted, as MacArthur’s statement would have given Chiang incentive to take any measure of provocation he wished against the Chinese mainland.

⁷³ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 126.

6. It would have undermined previous declarations of Formosa policy, including Truman's June 27th statement on the movement of the Seventh Fleet.
7. MacArthur's attempt to speak on Asia's behalf would have been rejected by various Asian leaders whose diplomatic support was needed for operations in both Formosa and Korea.
8. If unchallenged, the statement would have forced an increase in U.S. military commitments to Formosa.
9. It would have interfered with free world solidarity, particularly the joint efforts in matters such as European defense. More broadly, American credibility would have been questioned in the eyes of the free world, which would have perceived the United States as irresponsible in the fight against the Soviet threat.
10. Finally, the statement greatly undermined the president's role as an authoritative spokesperson on U.S. foreign relations.⁷⁴

Truman was infuriated, not so much by MacArthur's words, but by the fact that the general assumed the right to say what he said in front of what would later be a world audience. He also felt that it was regressive toward the Formosa issue that he had been carefully trying to finesse.⁷⁵ In response, the Department of Defense sent a telegram to MacArthur, courtesy of the president. It "directed the withdrawal of his message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars because various features with respect to Formosa are in conflict with the policy of the U.S and its position

⁷⁴ Department of State Letter. *Foreign Policy Aspects of the MacArthur Statement*. August 26th, 1950. Truman Library.

⁷⁵ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 126.

in the U.N.”⁷⁶ With the Formosa statement withdrawn, the damaging effects listed above were greatly reduced. The tenth one, however, persisted. Formosa was the first of many issues that put into question not only Truman’s presidential authority, but also MacArthur’s military professionalism.

Amphibious Assault



77

Despite his issues with the Truman administration on Formosa policy, MacArthur continued to plan his counter offensive against the North Koreans. He stood strongly against sending more troops to the Pusan perimeter, arguing that a frontal push from the beachhead would be bloody and indecisive. Noticing the enemy’s vulnerable supply position, MacArthur concluded that if he could paralyze North Korea’s thinly spread supply lines, he could in turn

⁷⁶ To Tokyo, tel. DEF 89880. August 26, 1950. Truman Library.

⁷⁷ General Douglas MacArthur and members of his staff during the Battle of Inchon. September 15 1950. Truman Library.

paralyze the capabilities of the red troops, the majority of whom were committed around Pusan; he needed to flank them from behind.⁷⁸ With roughly 82,000 North Korean troops focused on the Pusan offensive, the rest of the peninsula was vulnerable to amphibious assault. MacArthur conceived the idea of an amphibious landing to take place on September 15th at Inchon, just west of Seoul.

Washington was initially skeptical of MacArthur's plans. General Bradley believed amphibious warfare to be obsolete; he, and along with the Joint Chiefs, tried to talk MacArthur out of moving forward with the operation. He sent General Joe Collins and Admiral Forrest Sherman to Japan to do just that. Some of MacArthur's subordinates were also skeptical, including Admiral James Doyle, who told the general that "if I were asked, the best I can say is that Inchon is not possible."⁷⁹ MacArthur did not deviate from his plan, as he expressed confidence in the U.S. Navy, for which he had gained great respect during his campaigns in the Pacific. He also stressed the element of surprise in his argument, citing General James Wolfe's victory over the Marquis de Montcalm at the St. Lawrence River during the Seven Years' War.⁸⁰ The Joint Chiefs would eventually approve the plans, while Truman, reluctant to push back against the general, once again refused to say no.⁸¹

Despite MacArthur's confidence, the Inchon landing (codenamed Operation Chromite) was not without risk or hazards. It involved many geographic handicaps, which included "a narrow channel (So Sudo or 'Flying Fish Channel') leading to Inchon, an awkwardly located island (Wolmido or 'Moon Tip Island') which had to be assaulted first, and finally the most

⁷⁸ Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*, 349.

⁷⁹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 155.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 155.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 156-157.

ferocious tides in the Far East.”⁸² The 41 foot tides, which caused mud to obstruct the approaches of Inchon, were perhaps the biggest disadvantage. If American ships became mudbound, they would have been vulnerable to enemy guns. This did not deter MacArthur, who planned for Landing Ships (LST’s), nicknamed “Large Slow Target” by U.S Marines, to be totally exposed on a thousand-yard wide mudflat in plain view of the enemy.⁸³ In addition, a sudden change in weather could have prevented the use of airpower in dealing with shore installations.⁸⁴

The invasion fleet included 260 vessels. The landing itself would be performed by the American X Corps, which included the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division, totalling 70,000 men. For fire support, the X Corps was equipped with naval gunfire, carrier aircraft, and two artillery battalions.⁸⁵ A week prior to the target date, the preparations were made, and troops deployed from Japan and the United States were in position. “It was at this eleventh hour that MacArthur received a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff which chilled him to the marrow of his bones.”⁸⁶ The message stated the following:

We have noted with considerable concern the recent trend of events in Korea. In the light of the commitment to all the reserves available in the Eighth Army, we desire your estimate as to the feasibility and chance of success of projected operation if initiated on planned schedule.⁸⁷

MacArthur immediately lamented the possibility of Operation Chromite coming to a halt. Just like with the Formosa issue, the general once again sensed timidity and appeasement from an office in Washington, thousands of miles away. Unlike the Formosa situation, Inchon was an immediate battlefield issue; inaction, MacArthur argued in his reply to the Joint Chiefs, would

⁸² Major Bruce R. Pirnie, U.S. Army. *The Inchon Landing: How Great was the Risk?* Joint Perspectives. (West Point Library Special Collections), 88.

⁸³ Ibid, 89.

⁸⁴ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 118.

⁸⁵ Pirnie, *The Inchon Landing*, 93.

⁸⁶ Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*, 352.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 352.

have stopped a “golden opportunity to turn defeat into victory.”⁸⁸ In the end, the operation was approved and MacArthur, who barely had enough time to implement final planning, had to rush to get to Inchon in time to supervise the landing himself.⁸⁹

The assault began on September 13th, two days before the X Corps landed. U.N. warships, including destroyers, entered the harbor to take out Soviet-gifted floating mines while deliberately drawing enemy fire in order to identify the locations of North Korean shore batteries, which were then destroyed by naval artillery and warplanes. These bombardments continued to blast the port's defenses (and Inchon itself) over a 48 hour period. When MacArthur was informed that enemy guns at Wolmido Island, considered to be the key to the harbor's defense system, had ceased firing, he concluded that it was time to send in the Marines. On September 15th, Wolmido was captured in just 40 minutes. Inchon itself (which was nearly destroyed from the bombardment) had a skeletal defense, as the North Korean reinforcements had instead rallied toward Kunsan, likely due to American disinformation. With minimal resistance, Inchon was easily taken by midnight.^{90,91,92,93}

Following the victory at Inchon, MacArthur's X Corps moved inland, opting to divide its forces into two separate groups. The first headed for Seoul with the mission to cut communications to the south and take control of Kimpo Airfield. The other headed toward Suwon with the intention of capturing the city's air base and becoming the northern arm of the pincer movement (double envelopment) that MacArthur wanted to apply against both flanks of the

⁸⁸ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 158.

⁸⁹ Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*, 353.

⁹⁰ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 159-161.

⁹¹ Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*, 360-61.

⁹² Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 118.

⁹³ Pirnie, *The Inchon Landing*. 90.

trapped red forces. Kimbo fell in two days, while the battle for Seoul was not won until September 27th. Meanwhile, General Walton Walker, commander of the Eighth Army forces in Pusan, began his breakout offensive from the perimeter. The retreating North Korean troops were cut off by the X Corps from the north. With broken supply lines and no easy escape, the communist forces surrendered by the tens of thousands, though thousands did manage to flee to the north. In just a matter of days, everything south of the 38th parallel was liberated and Syngman Rhee was reinstated as President of the Republic of Korea.^{94,95}

The Joint Chiefs, initially skeptical of MacArthur's plan, would only offer the highest praise in a message sent September 29th, declaring that "from the sudden initiation of hostilities you have exploited to the utmost all capabilities and opportunities. Your transition from defensive to offensive operations was magnificently planned, timed and executed."⁹⁶ In the end, the Chiefs deferred to MacArthur, whose enthusiasm and confidence made them feel comfortable enough in doing so; they had the general's assurance of success on record and were ready to channel the blame back to him in the event that the landing failed.⁹⁷ Considered by many to be the most brilliant operation of MacArthur's entire career, the Battle of Inchon demonstrated his mastery of the military profession, tactically speaking.

Crossing the 38th Parallel

With the North Koreans completely routed, Truman's police action was a success. While the status quo was restored in the south, Kim Il Sung's communist regime subsisted in the north.

⁹⁴ Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*, 363-64.

⁹⁵ Brands, *The general vs. the President*, 163-64.

⁹⁶ *Letter to MacArthur from the Joint Chiefs of Staff*. Department of the Army. September 29th, 1950. Truman Library.

⁹⁷ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 158.

Gaining back between 25,000 and 30,000 fleeing troops and with most of his senior officers alive, Kim was secure against the advancing ROK forces.⁹⁸ Having accomplished its mission, it was time for the United States to decide whether to pull out of the peninsula and shift its focus back to Europe or to pursue its fleeing enemy across the 38th parallel, defeat the communists on their own ground, and unify Korea under Syngman Rhee's democracy, risking Chinese or Soviet intervention in the process. The latter course of action was beyond anything that the U.N. had bargained for at the time of Resolutions 82 and 83. The free world, however, was alarmed by the unsettling reality that peace and security on the peninsula would not be possible unless the enemy was pursued and destroyed; only then could the area be liberated in its entirety. The State Department argued that South Korea would never fully get back on its feet as long as Kim, or any communist power, controlled the many power stations and dams at the Yalu River up north. It was feared that "the Communists could have turned out the lights all over Korea any time the fancy took them. Knowing Communists, the Department said, the fancy would take them often."⁹⁹ MacArthur, high on his horse from the victory at Inchon, wanted to finish the job and pacify his enemy; he saw no reason not to send U.N. ground troops across the 38th parallel, as his planes had already entered North Korean airspace months prior. Nevertheless, the decision was a political one, not a military one.

In the end, Truman decided to take the risk. On September 27th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a draft directive that allowed MacArthur to pursue and destroy the enemy across the 38th Parallel. The directive came with three provisions: 1) If the Chinese or Soviets intervened and/or threatened to intervene, MacArthur would immediately report to Washington. 2) Neither

⁹⁸ Roll, *George Marshall*, 566.

⁹⁹ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 151.

warplanes nor ground troops were to cross the border into Manchuria (Chinese mainland across the Yalu River) or the Soviet Union. 3) Finally, “as a matter of policy,” no non-Korean ground forces could enter the northeast provinces of Korea that border these same communist territories.

¹⁰⁰ In addition, MacArthur received an “eyes only” from Secretary of Defense George Marshall, former Army Chief of Staff and Acheson’s predecessor as Secretary of State. Intended to keep MacArthur from waiting for U.N. approval (which would be a risky plan, due to the likelihood of a Soviet veto), Marshall, a legal agent of the U.N. himself, informed MacArthur that “we want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38th parallel.”¹⁰¹ Of course, the full message clarifies that Marshall only meant to feel untampered with regard to the actual crossing into North Korea; he did not want MacArthur to have to wait around for the U.N.’s approval. It was not a green light for MacArthur to do whatever he wanted, although the general would later use this message as justification for his future actions against the Joint Chief’s directive. Neither the directive nor Marshall’s note gave instructions on what to do militarily in the case of armed Chinese intervention. On October 7th, MacArthur would receive additional instructions from the Joint Chiefs for such a contingency, which allowed him to engage “as long as, in your judgement, action by forces under your control offers a reasonable chance of success. In any case, you will obtain authorization from Washington prior to taking any military action against objectives in Chinese territory.”¹⁰²

Addressing the commander of the North Korean forces, MacArthur delivered a message demanding his surrender, which declared that “the early and total defeat and complete destruction

¹⁰⁰ Roll, *George Marshall*, 557.

¹⁰¹ Marshall, George. *Outgoing Classified Message*. September 29, 1950. Truman Library.

¹⁰² Lovett, Robert. *Draft Message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the U.N. Commander*. October 7, 1950. Truman Library.

of your armed forces and warmaking potential is now inevitable.” MacArthur also demanded the release of all U.N. prisoners of war.¹⁰³ Had the North Koreans accepted, the peninsula would have likely achieved unification. In denying the general’s demand, North Korea was ready to continue the fight. American and ROK troops advanced in early October, achieving overwhelming military success. On October 7th, the U.N. General Assembly endorsed MacArthur’s offensive and the goal of establishing a “unified, independent and democratic government in the sovereign state of Korea.”¹⁰⁴ The fall of Pyongyang on October 19th was a symbolic victory for the free world, as it marked the first time since the start of the Cold War that a communist capital had been liberated. Pyongyang’s citizens showed no resistance; they were so overjoyed that they sacked the Russian commissary on Stalin Street.¹⁰⁵ As MacArthur approached the northern border, he sent South Korean troops to “mop up,” following the provisions of the September 27th directive.

Following his many victories against the red forces, MacArthur’s prestige was at an all time high, only comparable to that of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Meanwhile, Truman, facing midterm elections that November, wanted to be associated with MacArthur’s battlefield success in his role as commander in chief. At Acheson’s suggestion, Truman requested a meeting with MacArthur that would take place at Wake Island on October 15th, in the midst of the general’s northern offensive. Consisting of a private meeting between the general and the president and a larger meeting with military and civilian officials, including Acheson and Assistant Secretary Dean Rusk, the Wake Island Conference encompassed a broad range of topics. In the former meeting, both men cleared the air over the embarrassment surrounding the general’s Formosa statement. MacArthur also expressed his belief that the war was nearly over

¹⁰³ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 171.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 135.

and that there was “very little” chance of Chinese or Soviet intervention. The larger discussion covered the Peace Treaty in Japan, wavering U.N. support for Rhee’s government, and the possibility of a Pacific security alliance (mirroring the North Atlantic Alliance), among other things. Echoing his earlier assessment from the one-on-one meeting with Truman, MacArthur assured his audience that with “bases for our air force in Korea, if the Chinese tried to get down to Pyongyang, there would be the greatest slaughter.”¹⁰⁶ Satisfied with the conference, Truman returned home confident of two things: that the war would likely be over by Thanksgiving and that General MacArthur was back on the same page as U.S. policymakers. The events that would soon follow Wake Island demonstrated that neither prospect would come into fruition.

An Entirely New War

Just days after Truman returned from the conference, Mao Zedong decided to make his move. The Chinese intervention in Korea cannot be attributed to MaArthur any more than it can be to Truman or any policymaker; according to Acheson, “we all reached the conclusion that it was more likely that they would not come in than they would.”¹⁰⁷ The “entirely new war” that was about to begin was the result of intelligence failure, much to the likes of Pearl Harbor, first and foremost. Months before the war even began, Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai denounced the United States as an aggressor in the context of Korea and Formosa, labeling it the “most dangerous foe of the Chinese people.”¹⁰⁸ In a speech on October 1st, the anniversary of the founding of communist China, Zhou declared that China would not stand by and tolerate

¹⁰⁶ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 177-182.

¹⁰⁷ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 147.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 149.

imperialy-motivated foreign aggression on its neighbor, implied to be North Korea.¹⁰⁹ On October 2nd, 1950, Zhou told Sardar K.M. Panikkar, the Indian ambassador, that “if the U.S. or U.N. forces crossed the 38th Parallel, China would send troops to the Korean frontier to defend North Korea... he [the Chinese Foreign Minister] said that this action would not be taken if only South Korean troops crossed the Parallel.”¹¹⁰ When the message arrived in Washington, it was dismissed by the newly-established Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department, as Acheson said the Indian warning was “the mere vaporings of a panicky Panikkar.”¹¹¹

Beginning on October 19th, 180,000 red Chinese infantrymen secretly crossed the Yalu River bridges into Korea from Manchuria over a period of two weeks. Unaware of the Chinese presence, MacArthur began to unilaterally go against the third provision in the September 27th directive from the Joint Chiefs that prohibited the use of non-Korean troops in the territories close to the Soviet and Manchurian borders. This occurred on October 24th when he commanded Generals Almond (X Corps) and Walker (Eighth Army) to “use any and all ground forces... as necessary to secure all of North Korea.”¹¹² MacArthur defended his actions, first off, by saying that the ROK forces initially sent out to the borders had failed to mop up the area on their own. Second, the strictness of the provision was rather subjective; it was a “matter of policy,” rather than a clear-cut order. Finally, MacArthur believed that the restrictions stated in the directive could be ignored since Secretary Marshall’s eyes only message assured that the general was to

¹⁰⁹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 194.

¹¹⁰ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 147.

¹¹¹ Riedel, Bruce. “Catastrophe on the Yalu: America’s Intelligence Failure in Korea.” *Brookings*, September 13, 2017.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/09/13/catastrophe-on-the-yalu-americas-intelligence-failure-in-korea/>.

¹¹² Roll, *George Marshall*, 566.

feel “unhampered tactically and strategically.”¹¹³ Although not technically insubordinate, MacArthur’s actions made it clear to Washington that he was running the show. Opting to defer to the field commander’s best judgement, the Joint Chiefs and Marshall gave him the benefit of the doubt.

In a matter of days, it became known to MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs in Washington that Chinese regulars were in North Korea. Beginning on October 25th, the Chinese infantry began Mao’s First Phase Offensive, attacking ROK forces in Onjong, North Korea. This led to the first China-U.N. encounter in the Korean War, which effectively blocked the U.N.’s advance toward the Yalu River and inflicted heavy casualties upon the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division on November 1st. Five days later, MacArthur, convinced that China's actions did not reflect a major ground force commitment to the war, ordered American B-17’s to bomb the Yalu bridges. He saw the B-17’s as the one weapon he still had left against the Chinese due to major restrictions from Washington. These restrictions prohibited the “hot pursuit” of enemy planes that attacked his own and denied MacArthur the right to bomb North Korean hydroelectric plants along the Yalu that furnished electric power to Manchuria and Siberia.¹¹⁴

Great Britain, which was preoccupied with the security of Hong Kong, strongly urged the U.S. to keep its distance from the Chinese border.¹¹⁵ Concerned over the risk of hurting relations with the British and losing international support at the U.N., Truman ordered the bombing to be postponed and requested that MacArthur explain himself. Infuriated that his weapons were being taken away from him, the general reported “men and material in large force are pouring across all bridges over the Yalu... this movement threatens the ultimate destruction of the forces under my

¹¹³ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 196.

¹¹⁴ MacArthur, Douglas. 1964. *Reminiscences*. (Annapolis, MD: Bluejacket Books), 365.

¹¹⁵ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 228.

command.”¹¹⁶ He demanded the issue be brought to Truman’s attention immediately.

MacArthur’s protest only resulted in a modification to his order, permitting the bombing of “only the Korean end of the Yalu bridges.” Although this did slow Chinese entry, the bridges still stood and thousands of Chinese troops crossed every day; by mid-November, there were 300,000 Chinese troops in North Korea. MacArthur agreed with Washington that the Korean conflict should stay localized, if at all possible. For the time being, the general was told that, pending assessment of Chinese capabilities and strategic goals, he was to stick with his original mission (from the October 7th addendum on China), by which he was instructed to defeat all hostile forces north of the 38th Parallel as long as his chances of success were decent.¹¹⁷

Now fighting “an entirely new war” and determined to end it, MacArthur launched an offensive on November 24th. Discussing the campaign with Major General John Coulter, MacArthur was optimistic. He remarked: “You tell the boys that when they get to the Yalu they are going home. I want to make good on my statement that they are going to eat Christmas dinner at home.”¹¹⁸ At this time, MacArthur made the questionable strategic decision to split up his troops. The Chinese, hiding in the mountains, intended to ambush both the X Corps in the east and the Eighth Army in the west. On the eve of the 24th, Chinese forces made their Second Phase Offensive, taking advantage of the weaknesses of the open flanks while simultaneously maneuvering behind American units to throw them off guard and block their retreat. MacArthur, in a rare moment of defeat, transitioned from offensive to defensive strategy, admitting that managing the conflict was beyond his capacity as U.N. commander.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Roll, *George Marshall*, 573.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 574.

¹¹⁸ MacArthur, Douglas. *Home by Christmas Statement*. November 29, 1950. Washington Evening Star. Truman Library.

¹¹⁹ Roll, *George Marshall*, 575.

On November 30th, Truman was asked about nuclear weapons in a press conference. He told reporters: “We will take whatever steps are necessary to meet the military situation, just as we always have.” When pressed on the atomic bomb, Truman responded: “That includes every weapon we have... there has always been active consideration of its use.” He would later suggest that “the military commander in the field will have charge of the use of the weapons, as he always has.” Although the White House released a clarifying statement later that day that declared the president the only official who can authorize the use of atomic bombs, the damage was already done. Truman’s comments caused domestic and international uproar at the possibility that the conflict could escalate to nuclear weapons at MacArthur’s disposal.¹²⁰ The gaffe not only touched on a sensitive issue of civilian control, but also indicated to the world that the U.S. intervention was now beyond a simple police action.

As United States policy in Korea began the transition from hot pursuit to calculated restraint, MacArthur meanwhile endured a series of losses against the Chinese forces over the next month and a half. In the east, the X Corps, amid biting weather conditions, began their withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir to the port of Hungnam. On Christmas Eve, roughly 105,000 U.N. troops were evacuated by sea from Hungnam back to Pusan with cover from aircraft and naval gunfire. In the west, the Eighth Army, now led by General Matthew Ridgway, deliberately retreated to Seoul, intending to fortify. After two days, the city fell for the third time that year, forcing Ridgway to retreat further south past the Han River.¹²¹ Attempting to bounce back from another loss, MacArthur spoke with the U.S. News & World Report on December 1st, claiming that his forces were operating under an “enormous handicap” because he was restricted

¹²⁰ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 223-24.

¹²¹ Roll, *George Marshall*, 577-78.

from “hot pursuit” of Chinese aircraft and prohibited from bombing Manchurian bases. In the same interview, he said the situation was critical, but not yet hopeless.¹²² An enraged Truman issued a directive on December 6th that recommended United States officials “exercise extreme caution in public statements,”¹²³ an obvious attempt to keep the general in line.

By January, the Truman administration ordered MacArthur to hold a defensive line in Korea while the diplomats and politicians crafted a settlement with the Chinese. The general believed he had a binary choice: evacuation or all-out-war with China. On January 10th, 1951, impatient with the administration’s indecision, MacArthur sent a cable to Washington expressing his frustrations. He argued that asking his ‘exhausted’ troops “to hold a line in Korea and ‘trade life’ for an unidentified ‘political policy’ was ‘untenable.’”¹²⁴ However, when Marshall ordered an on-sight assessment of the American forces on the peninsula, it was discovered that contrary to MacArthur’s report, the Eighth Army was in great shape under General Ridgway’s leadership; morale was high and they were prepared for any attack. This revelation cost MacArthur credibility in the eyes of the administration. When the opportunity arrived, Ridgway scored several victories that annihilated 14 Chinese divisions. On March 7th, he launched Operation Ripper, which aimed to bring U.N. forces back up to the 38th Parallel. After crossing the Han River by surprise, Ridgway’s forces outflanked Seoul, which was abandoned and captured for the fourth and final time during the war. The 1st Marines continued to push further north towards Chuncheon, just shy of the 38th Parallel. While MacArthur began to fade, Ridgway gained significant national popularity for his bold leadership during the successful northern offensive.¹²⁵

¹²² Office of Senate Minority Policy Committee (1951). *MacArthur Statement*. December 1, 1950., New York Times. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹²³ Stueck, *The Korean War*, 179.

¹²⁴ Roll, *George Marshall*, 578.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 579.

Now that the tide of the war had turned in favor of the U.N. forces, Truman decided it was time to end the war by exercising restraint. On March 20th, Truman, Acheson, Marshall, and the Joint Chiefs informed MacArthur that the U.N. was to enter talks with the Chinese and Koreans about a political settlement of the war, while advising him not to advance back across the 38th Parallel. Before Truman got to make this announcement, MacArthur issued a communique of his own. Using aggressive language, the general began by insulting the Chinese government, citing “military weakness” and poor “industrial capacity.” He then threatened to expand the war into the Chinese mainland before making the offer to “confer in the field with the Commander-in-Chief of the enemy forces” in order to prevent “further bloodshed.”¹²⁶ Although MacArthur would later defend this statement as a calculated act of psychological warfare,¹²⁷ Truman was livid at the fact that all of Washington’s diplomatic preparations had been for nothing. This was the first of two public statements that would lead to MacArthur’s relief of command.

The second statement was given to Congressman Joseph Martin, a strong Truman critic, who read it on the House floor and later released it to the press. The letter recommended that the U.S. encourage Chiang’s troops on Formosa to join the fight against mainland China, something the administration had long ruled out. MacArthur then went on to attack Truman’s “Europe first” policy, claiming that the biggest communist threat was in Asia. He finished the letter with the uneasy declaration that “there is no substitute for victory.”¹²⁸ If MacArthur had his way, the United States would have bombed enemy supply bases in Manchuria, performed air reconnaissance over Chinese territory, imposed a sharp naval blockade of China’s coast, deployed

¹²⁶ Ibid, 580.

¹²⁷ Hudson, James. *Wife Heard Broadcast of Ouster, Broke News to General*. Nashville Tennessean. April 24, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹²⁸ Roll, *George Marshall*, 581.

Chiang's nationalist troops, intensified the economic blockade already in effect, and sent major U.S. reinforcements to Korea. These potential measures represented a rash series of assumptions on MacArthur's part, which lacked explanation regarding how they would have been executed without international cooperation, particularly with Great Britain. They also presented a greater risk of conflict with the Soviet Union, a risk Washington had already rejected. If MacArthur's thesis had been executed and failed, the United States would have had to answer to the world and to history.^{129,130} In making these two public statements, MacArthur not only violated Truman's December 6th order on public statements, but also projected a fundamental disagreement with United States policy and strategic objectives.

In a meeting with Marshall, Acheson, Averill W. Harriman (Truman's assistant and former Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs), and Bradley, Truman hoped to arrive at a unanimous decision regarding what to do about MacArthur in response to his recent policy statements. While Marshall, concerned about the morale of the troops, recommended that MacArthur be called home for consultation, Acheson was adamant that he should be relieved of command with as little fallout as possible. In the end, Marshall sided with Acheson and the decision became unanimous. Their collective arguments for firing MacArthur were "On military, rather than on political grounds," as the Joint Chiefs wanted to do everything in their power to avoid appearing politically motivated.

1. Their first argument was in response to MacArthur's strategic and tactical decisions, such as "splitting his forces in Korea and jumping off on his November offensive with inadequate field intelligence about the enemy."

¹²⁹ Renton, James. *Administration is Bound to Consider Facts Which MacArthur Ignores*. New York Times. April 22, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹³⁰ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 159-161.

2. MacArthur had lost confidence in himself and was beginning to lose confidence in his field officers.
3. (Referring to his violations of Truman's December 6th directive on public statements) He was insubordinate to Truman on policy.¹³¹

On April 11th, 20 minutes before the general received the envelope containing the orders for his dismissal, MacArthur's wife, who had been listening to a shortwave radio broadcast before lunch, broke the news to her husband.¹³² On that day, it was announced that President Truman fired the nation's senior five-star general, who was "unable to give his whole-hearted support to the policies of the United States government and of the United Nations in matters pertaining to his official duties."¹³³ He was to be replaced by General Ridgway as Commander-in-Chief of U.N. forces.

That day was described as one of the bitterest on Capitol Hill in modern times. Senate Republicans proposed MacArthur's reinstatement, his invitation to testify to a joint session of Congress, as well as Truman's impeachment. Of the 44,358 telegrams received by Congressional Republicans, all but 334 condemned Truman or took MacArthur's side.¹³⁴ Although the majority of newspapers, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, The New York Post, the Baltimore Sun, as well as conservative leaning papers, such as the Des Moines Register and the New York Herald-Tribune sided with Truman,¹³⁵ MacArthur still received public adulation. Back

¹³¹ McCullough, David. 1992. *Truman*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster), 840.

¹³² Hudson, James. *Wife Heard Broadcast of Ouster, Broke News to General*. Nashville Tennessean. April 24, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹³³ United Press. *Truman Fires General MacArthur: Failure to Back U.S. Policy Cited As Reason for Dismissal*. April 11, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹³⁴ McCullough, *Truman*, 845.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 846.

in Washington, the president, neither cocky nor apologetic, was prepared for the worst, politically speaking. For Truman, everything was calculated; he was willing to put principle over politics.

The day after MacArthur's dismissal, Truman received a call from ex-congressman Maury Maverick of Texas, who offered his support: "What you have done will make sure that my grandchildren will be free and that civilian government will continue in the United States."¹³⁶

When pressed by reporters to explain himself, Truman, a student of civil-military history, urged them to look at older cases of presidential dismissals, namely President Lincoln and General McClellan during the Civil War, as well as President Polk and General Scott during the Mexican-American War.¹³⁷ In retrospect, General MacArthur was the first and only to be removed from command for speaking out against U.S. foreign policy.

Old Soldiers Never Die

On April 18th, 1951, after 14 years in the Far East, MacArthur returned to the United States. Viewed as a transcendent figure by the Jacksonian folk community, the general was given a true hero's welcome. With Truman's approval below 30%, MacArthur had the power and influence to sway public opinion, something he had been doing throughout the war. Truman, who rose to power via political machinery in Missouri never made it a priority to cultivate public opinion. This clashes with the "rhetorical presidency," a Wilsonian concept that establishes the president as the leader of public opinion who is tasked with "interpreting" the wishes of the people, a manifestation of educated demagoguery.¹³⁸ In this case, it was MacArthur, not Truman,

¹³⁶ Pearson, Drew. *Truman Feared 'Mac' Would Jump Gun Again*. Denver Post. April 13, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹³⁷ *Even in His Firing, MacArthur Is in a Position by Himself*. Kansas City Times. April 13, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹³⁸ Milkis and Nelson, *The American Presidency*, 266.

who embodied the rhetorical presidency; had it been the other way around, Truman would have fired MacArthur much earlier. Following his perfect victory at Inchon, MacArthur's authority via public opinion was nearly indisputable.

Upon his return, MacArthur was seen by many as a "force for rallying the nation's scattered wits and shaken confidence,"¹³⁹ and as a unifying entity who had the power to call for coalition. The National Economic Council went so far as to call MacArthur "the nearest approach to George Washington."¹⁴⁰ He also had enough public support to widen the cracks in America and further the divide. In his speech to congress the following day, MacArthur did neither. He concluded with the following words: "And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Goodbye." By choosing to fade away from public life, MacArthur chose neutrality; he did not further rally public opinion against the president, nor did he utilize it to unite the country. However, although he disavowed all political ambitions, MacArthur would later carry out a speaking tour, mainly criticizing Truman, leading up to the 1952 election (in which Truman was not a candidate). He gave the keynote address at the 1952 Republican National Convention, hoping to be drafted in the event that the delegates were deadlocked between General Eisenhower and Senator Robert Taft, the two frontrunners to the nomination. Within a week of his 73rd birthday, and speaking out of uniform for the first time, MacArthur was a diminished figure. Despite MacArthur's euphoric greeting, the speech was poorly delivered and the Republican delegates recognized that he was not the person who would rebuild

¹³⁹ Alexander, Holmes. *MacArthur Passed up his Chance to Unite us to Meet the Crisis*. Los Angeles Times. April 17 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁴⁰ *America and MacArthur*. National Economic Council. May 1, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

the United States. Eisenhower, who had sided with Truman over MacArthur in 1951, went on to win both the nomination and the election in November.¹⁴¹

By May 1951, the senate began its inquiry into the events surrounding the Korean conflict and MacArthur's dismissal. The arrangement of the hearings turned into a partisan affair, with the Republicans requesting a special committee while the Democrats preferred to use the existing committees on Foreign Relations and Military Affairs. The parties also butted heads on publicity; the Democrats wanted closed hearings, while the Republicans wanted them broadcast and televised. The concern with public hearings was the possibility of U.S. adversaries, such as the Soviet Union, gaining access to strategic information like the Wake Island transcript, for example. With American military and diplomatic strategy exposed, "Russians would have been able to get items... for which they would have paid their agents vastly larger sums a few weeks before."¹⁴² Even MacArthur himself had previously advocated for censorship over publicity while head of the War Department's Bureau of Information during WWI. Citing the Crimean War and the Franco-Prussian War, MacArthur knew the danger of exposing intelligence via public outlets (newspapers in these cases).¹⁴³

The two parties eventually found compromise. The Republicans backed down on the issue of committees, while procedure required concessions from both sides: the Democrats allowed the hearings to be attended by all members of the Senate (as opposed to just members of relevant committees) while the Republicans conceded that there would be no public broadcast or

¹⁴¹ Brands, *The General vs. the President*, 387-389.

¹⁴² Schlesinger and Rovere, *The general and the President*, 181.

¹⁴³ Vaughn, Stephen. *Censorship and the News in 1916: Douglas MacArthur Versus Arthur Bullard*. West Point Library Special Collections.

correspondents in the hearing room.¹⁴⁴ A censored transcript of the hearings would later be made public in 1973.¹⁴⁵

On the Senate floor, all eyes were on Bradley and Marshall, who both gave the strongest arguments against the case for MacArthur. While Marshall gave the strongest testimony in justifying Truman's decision to relieve MacArthur, Bradley gave perhaps the most memorable statement of the hearing: "Red China is not the powerful nation seeking to dominate the world. Frankly, in the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this strategy would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."¹⁴⁶ Bradley was implying the real war was with the Soviet Union, and continuing to trade fire with the Chinese would have only weakened the United States going into the fight that mattered. Marshall, a general-turned-statesman, arguably had more authority than anyone on civil-military issues. Throughout the war, Marshall had, on more than one occasion, defended MacArthur in the latter's capacity as a theater commander thousands of miles away; as a former professional officer himself, Marshall wanted MacArthur to have the authority to make the right tactical decisions without being tied up by Washington. He regarded the dismissal as a "distressing necessity." He had hoped his "brother army general" could be talked into changing his ways, and ultimately regretted waiting so long for this unrealistic change to happen. In his testimony, he conveyed that a theater commander complaining to his superiors was typical, while "publicly expressing displeasure and disagreement with the foreign and military policy of the United

¹⁴⁴ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The general and the President*, 179.

¹⁴⁵ Wiltz, John Edward. 1975. *The MacArthur Hearings of 1951: The Secret Testimony*. (Lexington, Virginia: Society for Military History), 168.

¹⁴⁶ Senate Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, Hearings, 82d Congress, 1st session (1951). *Military Situation in the Far East*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

States” was “wholly unprecedented.”¹⁴⁷ The senate committees concluded that Truman’s actions were within the constitutional powers of the presidency.

Huntingtonian Analysis

Looking back at Samuel Huntington, this chapter will conclude by defining MacArthur and Truman’s respective roles as soldier and statesman. In many ways, MacArthur gave up his professional outlook. Huntington himself claims “MacArthur was a brilliant soldier, but always something more than a soldier: a controversial, ambitious, transcendent figure, too able, too assured, too talented to be confined within the limits of professional function and responsibility.”

¹⁴⁸ On the most fundamental level, MacArthur deviated from Clausewitz’s conception of civil-military relations and drifted closer to the theories of Erich Ludendorff, who believed that war reflected the absence of politics, rather than the extension. This led MacArthur to the belief that full wartime control must be in the hands of military commanders, in whom the state must instill its complete trust.¹⁴⁹

Throughout the later part of his career, the general fell victim to ideology; he vehemently opposed communism, and was extremely vocal regarding said opposition. He also justified war on moral and religious grounds in the 1920’s and 1930’s while “surrounding the warrior’s art with sentimental romanticism.”¹⁵⁰ Regardless of his professional military actions, they were always grounded in his opposition to communist ideology, something that was inherently unprofessional. MacArthur also deviated from the military mind in that he was optimistically

¹⁴⁷ Roll, *George Marshall*, 589.

¹⁴⁸ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 369.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 372.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 371.

dedicated to his missions, a contrast to the professional pessimism of the officer corps. While the professional officer is a realist, always in a constant state of insecurity and anxiety about the inevitability of war, MacArthur impulsively jumped at the possibility of extending the conflict in Korea; he intended to use his forces to escalate, rather than deter violence. Instead of using professional bias and overstating the threat of the enemy, MacArthur constantly downplayed the capabilities of his enemies, the Chinese in particular.

While the military mind is part of a collective spirit, driven by professional corporateness, MacArthur believed in individuality. During his three years as superintendent of West Point, MacArthur was seen as a “smasher of traditions.” One of his first acts in this position was to impress upon all instructors that each cadet should be entrusted with responsibility for himself and should not be treated “merely as a military robot.”¹⁵¹ His flamboyant and arrogant personality also caught the attention of both his superiors and subordinates. This was complemented by his appearance (i.e. the hat, the corncob pipe, etc.). When he landed in the Philippines in October 1944, he drew considerable attention. Lindsay Parrott, who covered MacArthur during WWII, wrote the following description of the landing:

There was a palm tree with its head shot off- to some, the most typical symbol of the Pacific War. There was the microphone at its base. There were the G.I.'s snapping cameras despite the gunfire only a few hundred yards away. At General MacArthur's back were the battleships, the aircraft carriers, the landing divisions- all the military power of the United States. 'I have returned,' General MacArthur said. Not the Army has returned, or the Navy, or the United States has returned- 'I' have returned.¹⁵²

A man of great prestige, MacArthur wanted everyone to know who he was. His commanding presence was a statement of individuality, the antithesis of the professional military mind.

¹⁵¹ *Traditions at West Point Upset by Gen. MacArthur*. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁵² Parrott, Lindsay. *MacArthur- Study in Black and White*. West Point Library Special Collections.

Perhaps what set MacArthur apart the most from the professional officer corps was his involvement with politics. Before the Korean War even started, the general held a statesman-like role during the U.S. occupation of Japan. Under MacArthur's leadership, Japan transformed into a nation devoted to world peace. The Japanese also adopted American ways, beliefs, and principles, substituting them for their own traditions. In ways other than military, MacArthur brought two previously warring nations together and made them loyal to one another in less than five years.¹⁵³ He was also given considerable political power as Field Marshal of the Philippine Army. In this position, MacArthur created the design of his own uniform, normally a task designated to the state. In addition, MacArthur stopped just short of officially seeking the American presidency on three occasions: 1944, 1948, and 1952. While he aspired to be commander in chief, he refused to abandon his post in the Far East to campaign for the presidency back home. On the latter occasion, he simply refused to organize, despite being back in the U.S. as a civilian. On all three occasions, MacArthur saw himself as a man of destiny who stood above the political process and expected the Republican nomination to be handed to him via draft at the convention; he did not understand, in contrast to Truman, that winning the presidency involved winning the support of existing party machinery.^{154,155}

In 1925, the general sat as a judge for Col. Billy Mitchell's court martial, where the latter was accused of making a statement accusing civilian army and naval leaders of treason, an offense that foreshadowed MacArthur's own public statements. Although he voted for Mitchell's acquittal, MacArthur acknowledged that "the violence of his [Mitchell's] language was

¹⁵³ Sullivan, Mark. *MacArthur as Statesman*. New York Herald Tribune. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁵⁴ Schonberger, Howard. *The General and the Presidency: Douglas MacArthur and the Election of 1948*. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁵⁵ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 370.

self-evident.¹⁵⁶ By the time of his dismissal, MacArthur lost hold of perhaps the most basic professional attribute: discipline, the backbone of the military.¹⁵⁷ Given his rich knowledge and relevant experience on civilian control, MacArthur should have known better than to criticize presidential decisions. Lacking discipline, he simply could not resist the temptation to speak out.

Despite these examples of divergence, MacArthur embodied the professional soldier in many ways. Huntington says that professionalism derives from experience, that the officer is expected to study history; MacArthur was no exception to this. As a cadet, he studied Civil War history in depth. During the planning of the Inchon landing, MacArthur famously cited General Wolfe, who led a similar amphibious assault at Quebec during the French and Indian War. Despite his title of U.N. Commander, the general was skeptical of the United Nations. He assessed other states from a realist lens, just as Huntington suggests professional officers should do. At the time of his firing, MacArthur theorized that his dismissal was part of a conspiracy with Great Britain, America's closest ally. In his subsequent testimony, he stated his hope that the U.S. would "go it alone" in Asia.¹⁵⁸ Technically speaking, MacArthur was an expert on the management of violence throughout his long career. Prior to Korea, he was successful in representing military needs, assessing risk, and implementing state decisions.

Prior to his statesmanship, Truman had been a citizen-soldier during WWI. Too old for the draft, he voluntarily enlisted in the army at 33, as he believed it was "a job somebody had to do."¹⁵⁹ Unlike MacArthur, Truman was not a professional soldier. He was driven by a patriotic cause and only served two years of active duty (he would later serve in the reserves during his

¹⁵⁶ Webb, William. *Truth Will Out*. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁵⁷ *Truman did What he Must*. The Denver Post. April 11, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁵⁸ Stokes, Thomas L. *He Would Have us "Go it Alone" in Asia*. Nashville Tennessean. May 8, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁵⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, 103.

subsequent statesmanship, something Huntington distinguishes from career officership). During his time at the European theater, Truman (now a commissioned officer) served as a battery commander, taking command of 194 men. Enforcing strict behavior on his men, Captain Truman transformed one of the worst batteries in the regiment into one of the best. During his first encounter with the enemy, Truman stood his ground in a display of courage under fire. He remained calm, later explaining that “the men think I am not much afraid of shells but they don’t know I was too scared to run and that is pretty scared.”¹⁶⁰ Despite his internal panic on the battlefield, Truman always put service before self, something that would carry through into his statesmanship.

Truman always had the greatest respect for the office of the presidency. According to Acheson, Truman believed that “the office was a sacred and temporary trust, which he was determined to pass on unimpaired by the slightest loss of power or prestige.”¹⁶¹ His actions were rooted in substance, rather than spectacle. He prioritized the Constitution over his own political image, and with the exception of the Wake Island Conference, Truman’s activities throughout the war were meaningful for what they achieved, rather than what they signified. In the end, results overshadowed gestures in Truman’s presidency, for which he paid the political price (but not the historical one). Had he chosen to utilize spectacle and/or the rhetorical presidency, he may have been able to save his reelection; Truman simply had no interest in playing this game.¹⁶² Truman also strongly believed in the executive authority of the statesman. After leaving office, he would reflect “that it is absolutely essential for a President to have information and advice. But he does not take directions, because it is the President’s responsibility alone to give

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 117-121.

¹⁶¹ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 415.

¹⁶² Nelson, Michael. 2018. *The Presidency and the Political System*. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE/CQ Press), 278-302.

directions. When he has the right information, he is in a position to make the right decisions- and he, and only he, must make them.”¹⁶³ Truman was never afraid to make these executive decisions, as he always stuck with principle while he held the nation’s highest office.

Truman’s press conference on the atomic bomb highlights a more contemporary lens of civilian control and effectively challenges Huntington’s traditional notion of professionalism. The bomb has essentially become a political weapon that has political implications, such as mutually assured destruction. As a result, the military and civilian organizations have converged, and as Cohen points out, objective control no longer makes sense; nuclear weapons must be looked at subjectively by the statesmen making the political decisions.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Truman, Harry S. 1960. *Mr. Citizen*. (New York City, NY: American Book-Stratford Press), 265.

¹⁶⁴ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 247

Chapter Three: The Historiography and Theatrics of Personal Rivalry in Civil-Military Affairs

Intro to Historiography



Eliot Cohen makes the claim that soldiers and statesmen merely coexisting with subordination, “that acceptance of the legitimacy of civilian dominance, is a deep undercut of mutual mistrust.” He describes the statesman-soldier relationship as an “uneasy, conflictual collaborative” one “... further exacerbated by the differences in experience and outlook... These

¹⁶⁵ *President Truman and General MacArthur*. October 15, 1950. Truman Library.

differences are not ideological, but temperamental.”¹⁶⁶ The main reason for General MacArthur’s removal was insubordination. The historian, however, must interrogate the circumstances behind this consequential moment between the general and the president, and whether these circumstances can be attributed to feelings or rationale. They can also question the true meaning of insubordination. The word is defined as a “defiance of authority; refusal to obey orders.” Because MacArthur was relieved for being “unable to give his whole-hearted support to the policies of the United States,” it can be argued that MacArthur was not fundamentally insubordinate to his direct superiors, as he never directly defied the orders of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was relieved because he spoke out against U.S. policy and was unable to accept the legitimacy of Truman’s undisputed civilian dominance; the soldier could no longer coexist with the statesman. The general’s outspokenness, as well as his geographical distance from Washington, gradually created a mutual distrust between the two men that led to behavioral, specifically temperamental, responses, as seen in the public statements and memoirs of both men. Looking at the historiographic works of Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Ranajit Guha as well as a close reading of Truman and MacArthur’s respective memoirs, this chapter will capture the behavioral psychology behind the great rivalry that led to perhaps the biggest moment in American civil-military history.

While both Truman and MacArthur are historical actors, they both also actively participated in the writing on history by contributing to their own narratives. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot concurs that “Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators. The inherent ambivalence of the word “history” in many

¹⁶⁶ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 10.

modern languages, including English, suggests this dual participation.”¹⁶⁷ He also argues that silence and negative space enter the process of historical production on several occasions.

Looking at the rivaling official statements and memoirs of both Truman and MacArthur, the historian can bridge the gap of silence, as he or she has two different perspectives from which to draw rational conclusions.

Prior to taking apart the respective Truman and MacArthur papers, it is necessary to divide them into two categories of discourse: primary and secondary, as described by Guha in *The Prose of Counter Insurgency*. Although his piece focuses on the historiography of peasant uprisings in India, the discourses he outlines play their part in the context of the Korean War and MacArthur’s dismissal. The first is primary discourse, appearing in time before anything else. Primary discourse emerges as the event is happening, typically from high ranking officials; it is meant for “administrative use--for the information of government, for action on its part and for the determination of its policy.”¹⁶⁸ Most importantly, these statements are made by the participants who were directly involved in the event being described. Primary discourse corresponds to the official statements and correspondence of both Truman and MacArthur throughout the course of the war.

Secondary discourse diverges from primary discourse in that it is not immediate. With the passage of time, there is opportunity for retrospectives and personal reflections. As Guha points out, “the secondary follows the primary at a distance and opens up a perspective to turn an event into history in the perception not only of those outside it but of the participants as well.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press.), 2.

¹⁶⁸ Guha, Ranajit. 1982. *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 47.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

He argues that memoirs are intended for public readership, whether they were written after the events took place or concurrently as they were happening. He also warns of bias within the discourse of those writing about a past of which they themselves were functionaries. Truman and MacArthur, both functionaries of the Korean War, were not free of bias themselves by any means. By looking at both sets of memoirs side by side, it is possible to uncover the behavioral relationship that helped to inform the perception of historical moments between the general and the president.

Primary Discourse

The first example of primary discourse was written by MacArthur in August 1950, just prior to the United States' entry into the Korean conflict. The issue developed not over Korea, but over American policy toward Formosa. MacArthur, who was vocal about the strategic importance of Formosa, insisted that the United States retain control of the island at all costs, as he believed it could one day serve as a base of operations against the Asian mainland, should the war on communism enter the battlefield. By August, the general made his views public in the infamous message he had sent to the annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars that would later be sent to all member newspapers - a specimen highly representative of primary discourse. As a reminder, MacArthur made the following statement near the close of his speech:

Nothing could be more fallacious than the threadbare argument by those who advocate appeasement and defeatism in the Pacific that if we defend Formosa we alienate continental Asia. Those who speak thus do not understand the Orient. They do not grant that it is in the pattern of Oriental psychology to respect and follow aggressive, resolute and dynamic leadership- to quickly turn on a leadership characterized by timidity or vacillation- and they underestimate the Oriental mentality.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 455.

For the first time during the Korean War, MacArthur is publicly expressing his frustrations with his civilian leadership - Truman in particular, whom he sees as “timid” and implies to be weak and inexperienced. Although not an act of insubordination, MacArthur is indirectly attacking his superior’s character and questioning his knowledge of the Far East. Later in his essay, Guha explains the importance of word choice and other various components (i.e., indices and functions) of discourse, which serve as a “vehicle of all ideology” and shape “the manner in which these (components) might have combined to describe any particular figure (or situation) of the past.”¹⁷¹ In particular, the words “appeasement” and “defeatism” (as opposed to, for example, “collaboration” and “pragmatism”) imply that Truman’s Formosa policy is weak and goes against the national interest. In this document, MacArthur not only goes after Truman’s character, but also his commitment to defending potential American allies and strategic interests in the Pacific theater; he has created a primary discourse that perfectly captures the behavioral conflict between the soldier and the statesman.

The general’s public statements continued to irk the president to the extent that Truman knew he had to fire MacArthur; it was simply a question of when. Politically, the task was bold, as MacArthur was well respected in Congress and among the American public. Given his numerous accomplishments, MacArthur had become a transcendent historical figure; this was reflected in his flamboyance and hubris. His leadership behind the decisive victory during the Battle of Inchon in October, 1950 added not only to his excessive pride, but also his political and public support. Truman, despite his accomplishments (e.g. dropping of the first atomic bomb, the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, NSC68, etc.), was seen by the public as a smaller, weaker

¹⁷¹ Guha, *Prose of Counter Insurgency*, 53.

and less educated leader than MacArthur by comparison. While their rival backgrounds obviously added to their dislike for one another, they also made it more difficult for Truman to address his grievances with his subordinate. Unlike MacArthur, Truman had to be more cautious with his word choice, as he did not want to lose political support by attacking the general. In his attempt to silence MacArthur's public statements on political issues, Truman issued his December 6th directive, recommending that

...officials overseas, including military commanders and diplomatic representatives, should ... exercise extreme caution in public statements... clear all but routine statements with their departments, and... refrain from direct communication in military or foreign policy with newspapers, magazines, or other publicity media in the United States.¹⁷²

The statement was clearly targeted at MacArthur, which is why Truman chose to single out “military commanders” in the first line and “public statements” in the third. By suggesting “extreme caution,” Truman was implying that the general was reckless and injudicious. The statement was Truman's attempt to put the general in line and shoot down any thoughts of transcendence over civilian leadership.

The next example of primary discourse comes from what would be MacArthur's final public statement as UN Commander in Chief. He was outraged when the administration announced its intention to negotiate a ceasefire following Ridgway's string of victories in March. Truman believed that a willingness to settle, without any threats or demands, would be respected not only by the enemy, but by the international community as a whole. Truman, Acheson, and the Joint Chiefs began drafting a presidential announcement on the subject. Despite the administration's long and careful preparations on the announcement, these efforts were rendered

¹⁷² Stueck, *The Korean War*, 179.

futile, as MacArthur issued his own statement on March 24th, 1951. The final paragraph reads as follows:

Apart from the military area of the problem where issues are resolved in the course of combat, the fundamental questions continue to be political in nature and must find their nature in the diplomatic sphere. Within the area of my authority as the military commander, however, it would be needless to say that I stand ready at any time to confer in the field with the commander-in-chief of the enemy forces in the earnest effort to find any military means whereby realization of the political objectives of the United Nations in Korea, to which no nation may justly take exceptions, might be accomplished without further bloodshed.¹⁷³

Upon this statement's release, Truman withheld his prepared announcement, as it would have only confused the world. The general's words represented an open declaration of foreign policy that contradicted the collective stance of the United States and the United Nations. MacArthur was bullying China by suggesting that he had the full preponderance of the United Nations and by threatening "further bloodshed". By publicly offering to meet with the Chinese leader, he was disregarding Washington and the State Department altogether; he was asking to do their job for them, as if their diplomatic efforts had been, and would continue to be, unsatisfactory. Among the United States' allies, there were immediate inquiries regarding the general's statement. There was a perceived shift in American policy, a mess that the State Department had to clean up. In essence, MacArthur was beginning to run away with the diplomatic ball in a display of arrogance that Truman could no longer tolerate. Although the issue of whether or not MacArthur was fundamentally insubordinate is still up for debate, it is without question that he could no longer coexist with his commander in chief, as suggested by his isolated statement.

MacArthur had always rejected containment strategy (which worked against communism in the end), believing that the battle over communism should be fought directly with red forces-

¹⁷³MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 442.

in Asia, not Europe. In his non-classified letter to Congressman Martin, the general laid out his most pronounced rebuke of the president in what history remembers as MacArthur's "no substitute for victory" declaration:

My views and recommendations with respect to the situation created by Red China's entry into war against us in Korea have been submitted to Washington in most complete detail. Generally these views are well known and generally understood, as they follow the conventional pattern of meeting force with maximum counter force as we have never failed to do in the past. Your view with respect to the utilization of the Chinese forces in Formosa is in conflict with neither logic nor this tradition. It seems strangely difficult for me some to realize that here in Asia is where the Communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest, and that we have joined the issue thus raised on the battlefield; that here we fight Europe's war with arms while the diplomats there still fight with words; that if we lose this war to Communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable, win it and Europe would most probably avoid war and yet preserve freedom. As you point out, we must win. There is no substitute for victory.¹⁷⁴

This statement represented a challenge to national policy on multiple fronts. By bringing up the Formosa situation, he was reopening a subject that had been previously thought settled in favor of ruling out an alliance with Chinese Nationalist forces. By praising Congressman Martin (the anti-Truman Republican minority leader and steadfast isolationist who on numerous occasions opposed forward-looking foreign policies) as being "in conflict with neither logic nor tradition," MacArthur was directly implying that Truman's policy lacked both of these attributes. By going straight to Truman's political rival in Congress, MacArthur was undermining and bullying the president. In declaring that there "is no substitute for victory," MacArthur was disregarding the efforts that Truman had already set forth on the entire European front. He did not consider the sacrifices necessary to combat Communism in places like Greece, Iran, and Berlin; there was no mention of the Marshall Plan, considered to be one of the greatest diplomatic efforts of all time. Clearly, MacArthur's definition of victory was worlds apart from Truman's and the rest of the

¹⁷⁴ Truman, Harry S. 1956. *Memoirs. Years of Trial and Hope*. (New York, NY: Time, Inc.), 445.

diplomatic community. Furthermore, his public comment was belittling toward the diplomatic efforts of the United States and to Truman personally, who at that moment had privately made the decision to dismiss the general.¹⁷⁵ This discourse alone summarizes the fundamental conflict between the soldier and the statesman: the former must endeavor to use the right language to ensure that they merely offer critique toward United States policy and/or the commander in chief without publically disputing either.

Secondary Discourse:

Emotion, temperament, and other psychological components, are captured in the secondary discourse of Truman and MacArthur's memoirs, written in 1956 and 1964, respectively - many years after the events took place. It should be noted that MacArthur would go on record to characterize Truman's memoirs as "a labyrinth of fancy and fiction" that "does such violence to the truth that to remain silent would be a disservice to the nation."¹⁷⁶ Taking this into account, the historian should be on the lookout for bias in both opposing memoirs and maintain a critical lens at all times in order to paint a bigger picture of what went wrong in the civil-military crisis.

In Volume Two of Truman's *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope*, the now retired president expresses his thoughts on MacArthur, Korea, and civilian control. Prior to the Korean War, Truman barely had any personal contact with MacArthur. While he knew of the great

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 446.

¹⁷⁶ New York Times. *MacArthur, in Reply, Says Truman Erred in Strategy*. February 9th, 1956. West Point Library Special Collections.

general's legend, he had never met with him face to face. For this reason, Truman made the trip to Wake Island. In the following passage, he expresses his frustration on the matter:

I thought that he ought to know his Commander-in-Chief and that I ought to know the senior field commander in the Far East. I have always regretted that General MacArthur declined the invitations that were extended to him to return to the United States, even if only for a short visit, during his years in Japan. He should have come back to familiarize himself with the situation at home.¹⁷⁷

This statement illustrates a fundamental issue of civilian control: the soldier and the statesman will have great difficulty working together if there is no interpersonal communication between the two actors. MacArthur had little knowledge of the domestic situation in the United States; he had never left the Pacific after the Second World War. At the same time, Truman felt distant and uninformed, having been stuck in the Oval Office in Washington throughout the proceedings of the war. Truman was mainly frustrated with MacArthur who, in rejecting offers to return to the United States, was essentially rejecting civilian authority, while the general simply felt that the situation at home was irrelevant and the developments in the Far East were his sole concern. Although MacArthur's distance was not an act of insubordination, it was a display of arrogance that reached Truman's attention at an early stage in the war.

Truman's personal frustrations with the general continued to escalate following the decisive Chinese victory during the Second Phase Offensive in November, 1950. Following the Battle of the Ch'ongch'on River in the western part of North Korea and the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in the eastern part of North Korea, the U.S. suffered heavy casualties. MacArthur had privately expressed his concern to Washington over Chinese intervention. He also had full access to a national intelligence report, summarizing that the Chinese communists would "at a

¹⁷⁷ Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 363.

minimum” increase their operations in Korea, seek to weaken and immobilize UN forces, and maintain the appearance of a separate North Korean state. Despite the intelligence summary and his own personal reservations, MacArthur still launched a major attack on November 24th, declaring it “a general offensive... to end the war.” The general then made his infamous “home by Christmas” promise, something he knew would be impossible. Despite the failure of the offensive, Truman did not blame MacArthur for the heavy losses. He wrote that

I do blame General MacArthur for the manner in which he tried to excuse his failure. In the first place, there was no need for him to proclaim this as an ‘end-of-war’ offensive. If he knew that the forces opposing him were not so strong that they could stop him, then certainly his earlier message to the Chiefs of Staff had been wrong. But if he had been right earlier in November, then he could hardly have expected to score an easy victory now. There was no excuse for the statements he began to make to certain people as soon as the offensive had failed. Within a matter of four days he found time to publicize in four different ways his view that the only reason for his troubles was the order from Washington to limit the hostilities to Korea. He talked about ‘extraordinary inhibitions... without precedent in military history’ and made it quite plain that no blame whatsoever [should be] attached to him or his staff. (382) Even before he started his ill-fated offensive on November 24, he still talked as if he had the answers to all the questions. But when it turned out that it was not so, he let all the world know that he would have won except for the fact that we would not let him have his way... Of course every second lieutenant knows best what his platoon ought to be given to do, and he always thinks that the higher-ups are just blind when they don’t see his way. But General MacArthur- and rightly, too would have court-martialed any second lieutenant who gave press interviews to express his disagreement... I should have relieved General MacArthur then and there.¹⁷⁸

Truman’s grievance with MacArthur here is that the general was overly aggressive in his unrealistic campaign, and that he ultimately failed to take responsibility for his actions in light of this failure. In essence, he is suggesting that MacArthur felt he had the authority to do or say whatever he wanted in the Pacific theater, as long as he had the option to put the blame on Washington/the Truman administration if something went wrong. A military professional for

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 382.

over 50 years, MacArthur did have the authority to act as if he had all the answers. If his actions backfired, it was the result of “extraordinary inhibitions,” rather than faulty intelligence or poor evaluation. Because he had overwhelming domestic support, MacArthur’s authority was even more pronounced. Truman, a former military officer, understood to a certain extent what it meant to be a subordinate. From a military perspective, he was appalled that MacArthur was questioning his decisions. From an interpersonal perspective, Truman was frustrated by the arrogance of the general, who acted like he had “all the answers.” Truman was not only frustrated by MacArthur’s theatrics, but also disappointed that he himself was indirectly being labeled as a barrier in the way of victory. Although not insubordinate, a soldier taking unnecessary risks and refusing to take any responsibility for his or her mistakes will always be seen as a hindrance to civilian leadership.

Truman wrote that he felt totally belittled by MacArthur’s “no substitute for victory” speech on March 20th, 1951. When MacArthur tried to provoke China four days later (see quote on page 8), Truman felt that in order to uphold the Constitution, relieving the general was the only way to move forward.

By this act MacArthur left me with no choice- I could no longer tolerate his insubordination. I can only say that on the day I was deeply shocked. I had never underestimated my difficulties with MacArthur, but after the Wake Island meeting I had hoped that he would respect the authority of the President. I tried to place myself in his position, however, and tried to figure out why he was challenging the traditional civilian supremacy in our government.¹⁷⁹

In this passage, Truman describes his gut reaction from the day MacArthur’s statement was released. He was not only shocked about the content, but also disappointed that his relationship with MacArthur has not changed since the Wake Island Conference just a few months earlier. By

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 442.

continuing to speak out against US policy, MacArthur proved that no progress had been made between the general and the president. Although Truman felt it was his constitutional duty to dismiss MacArthur, it is clear that he could no longer handle the general's actions on a personal level either; he felt that the general was disrespecting the office and the officeholder of the American presidency. The number of times MacArthur had spoken against the administration's policies was taking its toll on Truman emotionally, who was beginning to feel that his authority as commander in chief was being rendered totally inconsequential. Truman even tried to empathize with MacArthur to try to understand the latter's position; he could not come to terms with the fact that a professional soldier was behaving this way. Civilian control can only function if there is a sense of trust and understanding between the civilian and military leadership, which was simply not the case with Truman, who was unable to comprehend MacArthur's rationale for his words and actions throughout the course of the war.

Likewise, in *Reminiscences*, MacArthur expresses his own thoughts on Truman and the war. On August 4th, 1950, following MacArthur's controversial trip to Formosa and just prior to his statement on the matter to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the somewhat alarmed Truman administration sent Averell Harriman to Tokyo to confer with the general "on political aspects on the Far East situation."¹⁸⁰ It was Truman's intention to get to the bottom of what possible political discussion in Formosa could have resulted in Chiang's sudden declaration of Sino-American military cooperation. Upon reflection, MacArthur noted the following impressions about his conversation with Secretary Harriman:

... that there was no apparent interest in mounting an offensive against the communists; that we were content to attempt to block their moves, but not to initiate any counter-moves; that we would defend Formosa if attacked, just as we had done in Korea; that President Truman had conceived a violent

¹⁸⁰ Truman, Harry. Letter to MacArthur. August 3rd, 1950. Truman Library.

animosity toward Chiang Kai-shek; and that anyone who favored the Generalissimo might well arouse the President's disfavor. He left me with a feeling of concern and uneasiness that the situation in the Far East was little understood and mistakenly downgraded in high circles in Washington.¹⁸¹

These words reflect MacArthur's first impressions of Truman as an individual, rather than the figurehead of Washington. In the first part of the paragraph, he points out the supposed lack of commitment towards combating communism; he believed the Truman administration had no comprehensive plan and did not feel compelled to pursue one to address the situation in the Far East. MacArthur, a personal friend of Chiang Kai-shek, is already put off by Truman's seemingly preconceived dislike of the Generalissimo. On an interpersonal level, the general already had a better relationship with the Chinese Nationalist leader than with the president of the United States; he hadn't even met the latter individual at this time. Although MacArthur blamed the "high circles in Washington" for his feelings of concern and unease, he was mainly targeting the president, via synecdoche. In the end, concern and unease are the best words to describe MacArthur's early relationship with his commander in chief. Although the war had not yet begun, *Reminiscences* suggests that the initial feelings of anxiety and mistrust between the general and the president would set the stage for the inevitable conflict between the two.

From the beginning of their personal relationship, MacArthur felt uneasy about Truman. Although he seemed to like Truman as a person, he was concerned with the president's leadership abilities following their meeting at Wake Island. The passage below summarizes MacArthur's reaction to the conference.

He seemed to take great pride in his historical knowledge, but, it seemed to me that in spite of his having read much, it was of a superficial character, encompassing facts without the logic and reasoning dictating those facts. Of the Far East, he knew little, presenting a strange combination of distorted history and vague hopes that somehow, some way we could do something to

¹⁸¹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 341.

help those struggles against communism... The conference at Wake Island made me realize that a curious, and sinister, change was taking place in Washington. The defiant, rallying figure that had been Franklin Roosevelt was gone. Instead, there was a tendency toward temporizing rather than fighting it through. The original courageous decision to boldly meet and defeat communism in Asia was apparently being chipped away by the constant pounding whispers of timidity and cynicism. The President seemed to be swayed by the blandishments of some of the more selfish politicians of the United Nations. He seemed to be in the anomalous position of openly expressing fears of over-calculated risks that he had fearlessly taken only a few months before¹⁸²

This scathing evaluation of the president speaks directly about his character. MacArthur writes about what he interpreted as the superficiality of Truman and Washington as a whole. He argues that trivial knowledge and historical facts are meaningless in a time of war, unless they are relevant to the situation. From MacArthur's perspective, communism was the issue at hand, and the Pacific was where it was being fought; he could have done without Truman's theatrics at the meeting. The second half of this passage compares Truman to his predecessor, President Roosevelt. By describing FDR as a defiant, rallying figure, MacArthur is suggesting that by comparison, Truman is acquiescent and hesitant. Rather than fighting the communists directly, he sees Truman as backing down and continuing to dance around the problem, a reflection of timidity. He goes on to imply that Truman is unable to think for himself, suggesting that the president yields to the opinions of the United Nations. MacArthur expects his commander in chief to be assertive and to make his own decisions in the interests of the United States, independent from those of international institutions. In the final sentence, MacArthur points out that the president has openly expressed his fears in an indecisive display of weakness. Following their meeting at Wake Island, the general clearly did not have faith in Truman's leadership or knowledge of the enemy. As the theater commander, MacArthur believed he was faced with the

¹⁸² Ibid., 363.

formidable task of defeating his enemy on his own while his commander in chief was too timid and unprepared to act.

Following the Chinese intervention, MacArthur's frustrations with Truman continued. Having been forced back across the 38th Parallel, the general suffered one of the only defeats in his 50 years of service. His public statements (see quotes on pages 7 and 8) reflected his frustrations with the president, which ultimately led to the relief of his command. Reacting to his dismissal and the Korean War as a whole, MacArthur wrote the following:

I had heard much of President Truman's violent temper and paroxysms of ungovernable rage, and had noted with growing concern his increasingly indecisive handling of the Korean situation. From strength in his original decision to free and unite Korea, he had, step by step, weakened into a hesitant nervousness indicative of a state of confusion and bewilderment. He had never been to Korea, and his ignorance of the Far East and its peoples had become a dangerous failing in one responsible for final decisions. It was quite apparent his nerves were at the breaking point- not only his nerves, but what was far more menacing in the Chief Executive of a country at war- his nerve.¹⁸³

This assertion, although more intense, echoes the previous one in that MacArthur does not think Truman is emotionally capable of leading. The key words in his claim are "nervousness" and "indecision," as opposed to caution or vigilance. He also questions Truman's temperament, citing "ungovernable rage," which he apparently had heard about through second-hand sources. Toward the end, MacArthur is finally saying directly what he had been insinuating in his previous statements: that Truman failed the office of the presidency due to his ignorance of the Far East and his lack of experience on the Korean Peninsula. By this point, MacArthur had accepted his dismissal, as he could no longer serve under a man whom he did not believe to be fit for the presidency. These examples of secondary discourse from both Truman and MacArthur

¹⁸³ Ibid., 393.

demonstrate a lack of empathy from both the general and the president, who even after years of reflection, could not see eye to eye with one another.

Gestures and Subtleties at Wake Island

Moving on from primary and secondary discourse, outside parties also help to fill in the blanks which Truman and MacArthur, the two principal actors, did not cover in their respective official statements and memoirs; it will look closely at small, individual moments between the actors that were captured by others. The Wake Island Conference was the only time both primary actors came together face to face. One can only speculate that MacArthur must have been greatly annoyed to meet with the president, who arguably made the trip with his midterm elections in mind. MacArthur was in the middle of fighting a war, and he clearly did not want to be interrupted to be part of a political stunt. One of the general's subordinates, Brigadier General Whitney, would later recall that MacArthur "paced relentlessly up and down the aisle of the plane" during the eight-hour trip to Wake. The president eventually arrived at 6:30 AM. Upon meeting him, MacArthur made a gaffe that nearly everyone noticed (both officials and non-officials); he shook Truman's hand without saluting. As a professional soldier, MacArthur knew better than anyone else that saluting the commander in chief was warranted. By ignoring basic customs and courtesies, MacArthur, in this instance alone, demonstrated that he did not respect the authority of the president of the United States. General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, would later remark that the subtle gesture was "insulting... whether intended or not." MacArthur would later decline Truman's offer for lunch, a gesture that does not violate any customs or courtesies, but is still rude and disrespectful, considering the

president travelled halfway around the world to see him.¹⁸⁴ It is also worth noting that Truman, who brought the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and an entire group of experts to discuss key issues, was disappointed to see that MacArthur was accompanied only by his valet, his personal doctor, and Ambassador to Korea John Muccio. The absence of any experts on the general's side was another reason for the conference's abbreviated pace.¹⁸⁵ Despite the president's frustrations, he personally awarded MacArthur his fifth and final Army Distinguished Service Medal, a spectacle of civil-military history. In the end, these subtle moments speak volumes about what MacArthur thought of Truman as a commander in chief and as a person. At the time, however, both men kept their respective assessments of the other to themselves; they continued their facade in the eyes of the world as their rivalry only became more intense. In pausing the flow of history at this consequential moment between both functionaries, it is easy to interpret a greater meaning from the Wake Island Conference as it relates to civilian control and the question of insubordination.

These examples of primary and secondary discourse demonstrate that President Truman and General MacArthur were incompatible to lead the nation together in a time of war. Historiographically speaking, this chapter has supplemented the official policy differences between the two men with behavioral evidence of their personal rivalry. Aside from their personal differences, there was also a lack of consensus on the meaning of victory. While MacArthur had been on record stating his enduring respect for civilian control of the military, from Truman's perspective, his critiques of the president and vocal opposition to the administration's policies were what pushed the general into the realm of insubordination. At the

¹⁸⁴ Wiltz, John E. *Truman and MacArthur: The Wake Island Meeting*. Indiana University Press, 1977. West Point Library Special Collections.

¹⁸⁵ Pearson, Drew. *Washington Merry-Go-Round*. Bell Syndicate, Inc. 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

same time, Truman had emphasized the importance of critique, and had warned repeatedly of the dangers of appointing only “yes men.” In the end, it was a conflict of principles: the perceived timidity of the president and the perceived aggression of the general. In addition, there was a lack of empathy; Truman had never been to Korea and did not have the tactical knowledge of a theater commander, while MacArthur, stuck in his own bubble in the Pacific, was blissfully unaware of American foreign policy as a whole, as it applied outside of Asia. Looking at their words, in both official statements and retrospective commentary (with a little help from secondary observers), the historian has all the tools he or she needs to fill in all the psychological gaps behind one of the greatest rivalries in American history.

Conclusion

Reflections on MacArthur



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Returning to Eliot Cohen and civilian control, it can be said without question that Truman would be a fine addition to the triumphant wartime leader bracket. His assertion of presidential

¹⁸⁶ Schlesinger and Rovere, *The General and the President*, 161.

power was not only appropriate in the context of statesmanship, but necessary for world peace. First and foremost, Washington's faith in MacArthur's military judgement was fading; following the Chinese intervention, he challenged his enemy with forces he knew to be inferior in numbers and attacked along a 300-mile front with forces that could not handle a fraction of that length. He led American forces to one of their greatest defeats while losing confidence in himself and the rest of his troops.¹⁸⁷ More importantly, Korea was a political conflict, often called "the war against war." It was unlike any war that MacArthur had fought in his professional career. While the spectacle of timidity and appeasement was a reasonable concern for the general, who looked to pacify his enemy, the American effort needed to be led in the realm of statesmanship in relation to U.S. grand strategy and national interest as a whole.¹⁸⁸ MacArthur, who spent the final 14 years of his career in Asia, could only conceive his objectives from the limited perspective of his own theater in the Pacific; he could not fathom why the United States had shifted its course from hot pursuit of the enemy to restraint. In the context of the Pacific Theater alone, restraint could be discerned as a way to channel appeasement. Focusing outward toward the greater free world and the international network within it, restraint against China could be recognized as a broader step closer to victory against communism. In simple terms, MacArthur's professional expertise could have won the battle, but not the war, which was just as pertinent to the European theater as it was to the Pacific. The claim that "there is no substitute for victory" only further illustrates MacArthur's limited perspective. In the alternative history that MacArthur had his way and that his campaign into mainland China was successful, the general still did not have a contingency plan for the Soviet Union, which was a totally separate entity with different

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 152.

¹⁸⁸ Valentine, Ross. *Hero Worship and the Old Soldier*. Richmond Times. May 7, 1951. West Point Library Special Collections.

objectives than those of the Chinese. As a military professional, MacArthur and his contentions were valuable to the state, as a soldier who never challenges civilian direction can be seen as complacent and weak-minded. As Huntington states very clearly, it falls on the professional officer to assess state policy and the risks associated with said policy. MacArthur simply took things too far.

Failure to assume the validity of the state's opinion is inherently unprofessional. MacArthur not only rejected state opinion, but he also publicly rebuked it on numerous occasions. Any member of the armed services knows to uphold the military's apolitical stance; it is drilled into their minds during the indoctrination phase of their service. Everyone is held to the same standard, regardless of rank or meritorious achievement. In speaking out against the Truman administration and its policy, MacArthur was insubordinate to his commander in chief. Although his statement on Formosa was forgiven, his subsequent statements were inexcusable. There is no ambiguity surrounding this fact, as his words were an explicit violation of Truman's December 6th directive on public statements. This is the technical, black and white perspective. Subjectively speaking, MacArthur's statements were problematic in that he was trying to carry out orders as U.N. commander and yet was simultaneously trying to have those orders changed through appeal to political passion and public opinion. Had he been truly concerned about the direction the state was following, and he had exhausted all channels to correct that course, it would have been his professional prerogative to ask for relief from his post, return to the United States, and plead his case to Congress and the American people, speaking publicly as a concerned citizen with professional expertise.¹⁸⁹ In failing to do this, MacArthur left Truman

¹⁸⁹ Baldwin, Hanson. *The MacArthur Ouster*. April 12, 1951. NY Times. West Point Library Special Collections.

with no choice but to dismiss the general in an effort to prevent global conflict and protect the sacred office of the president.

While MacArthur's dismissal was justified, it can be argued that Washington had the general on a leash, which hindered his professional military ability during the earlier phase of the war. During the planning of the Inchon landing, Washington expressed its timidity at the last minute. Had MacArthur hesitated by even a day, the operation may well have failed due to the tides of Inchon. At the time, the policy of the United States was to enforce a police action - go in, liberate South Korea, and get out. It was MacArthur's job to provide the means of this policy, and to do so unimpaired by civilian authorities 7,000 miles away. In the end, Washington put its trust in the general, and surely enough, he was successful in winning back the south.

The decision to proceed north of the 38th Parallel was also political. With the success of the police action, Truman then had to choose either a policy of restraint or pursuit, the latter of which aimed for unification of the peninsula with the risk of escalation. It was a decision made by the State Department and the administration that was supported by the U.N. MacArthur did not proceed until he received the go-ahead from Washington. The directive he received from the Joint Chiefs was a reflection of political timidity and indecision, as it was always subject to modification and addendums. While sending U.S. troops toward the Yalu went against the Joint Chiefs directive ("as a matter of policy"), MacArthur did so because ROK forces could not get the job done themselves. In order to comprehensively execute U.S. policy, his only choice was to use his professional judgement, go against the indecisive directive, and send in American troops anyway.

Based on the intelligence from Ambassador Panikkar, the Chinese were prepared to intervene, should the United States cross the 38th Parallel; their intervention was not the result of anything MacArthur did once that decision had already been made by Washington. When Truman pulled the trigger to pursue the North Koreans, the “entirely new war” had already begun, and it fell on MacArthur, as a professional soldier, to pursue the strategic ends of the state. When the Chinese did enter Korea, MacArthur’s best tactical move would have been to cut off the Yalu bridges entirely, rather than only bombing the Korean portions of the bridges, as directed by Washington. Resorting to meek half-measures only cost more American lives. While the prospect of accidentally hitting Manchuria and facing international consequences posed a moderate risk, it was a risk worth taking for the safety of the American troops, which should have been everyone’s top priority. In addition, MacArthur should not have been restricted from utilizing his airpower against North Korean power plants and attacking planes prior to China’s Second Phase Offensive. By denying MacArthur key tactical advantages within North Korea, Washington was actively making the inevitable war with China even less manageable. From the enemy’s perspective, even the slightest gestures of timidity and hesitation broadcast the message that both American troops and American leadership were in equal disarray; it made the Chinese feel secure in maneuvering against an enemy that they knew was handicapped. Chinese General Lin Piao would later write in an official leaflet that “I would never have made the attack and risked my men and military reputation if I had not been assured that Washington would restrain General MacArthur from taking adequate retaliatory measures against my lines of supply and communication.”¹⁹⁰ Evidently, had MacArthur been given just a little more freedom, he could

¹⁹⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 375.

have successfully deterred the enemy by sending the message that the U.S. was not afraid to fight back. Surely, the international community would have been sympathetic; it would have recognized that U.S. intentions did not go beyond standing its own ground.

As the war went on, Washington became increasingly indecisive. While Bradley, Marshall, Lovett, Acheson, Rusk, and the Joint Chiefs all privately agreed on a ceasefire with China in early November, they failed to seize control of the war despite their consensus. Instead, the war continued for months without diplomatic efforts while American troops were being killed in the meantime. As far as MacArthur was concerned, the political objective of the United States was still the unification of Korea. Marshall even admitted during his congressional testimony that the general was being kept in the dark on policy. MacArthur, who was told in January to hold a defensive line across Korea, became even more professionally hindered, due to the rough, mountainous geography of Korea, where he was told to stay put while the indecisive diplomacy continued. As a professional soldier, he could not have effectively managed violence in the impossible situation that resulted from Washington's vacillation.

To summarize, MacArthur was wrong to speak out against U.S. policy, but was totally justified in feeling strategically handicapped by the indecisive bureaucracy in Washington, a view that was shared wholeheartedly by Marshall, who initially told the general to feel "unhampered tactically and strategically" and would later side with Truman on MacArthur's dismissal. In relieving the general, Truman was putting civil-military relations into practice; as the statesman in charge, he simply substituted MacArthur's professional expertise for Ridgway's. It worked in the end, as MacArthur accepted his dismissal and American democracy was never at risk. At this point, Cohen's earlier analogy on the normal theory of civilian control,

which compares professional soldiers to highly-trained surgeons, can be put to the test. In Cohen's view, the patient must intervene if he or she believes the current operation will ultimately lead to broader health issues that affect the body as a whole (i.e. WWII). Cohen must also reconcile that if the patient takes away all of the surgeon's medical instruments, the latter becomes inherently less professional as a result and the patient's immediate health issue may be rendered unsolvable.

Implications on Contemporary Civil-Military Relations

This case study highlights two civil-military issues that hold contemporary significance: the geographical divide between the theater commander and Washington, as well as the interpersonal tension between the soldier and the statesman. The first issue has been essentially resolved by technology and the information age. The second one has not.

In MacArthur's office in Japan, he had a framed quotation from Livy that spoke to the views of Roman general Lucius Aemilius Paulus, who declared war on the Macedonians in 168 BCE:

...What then is my opinion? That commanders should be counselled chiefly by persons of known talent... who are present at the scene of action, who see the country, who see the enemy... and who, like people embarked in the same ship, are sharers of the danger. If, therefore, anyone thinks himself qualified to give advice respecting the war which I am to conduct... let him not refuse his assistance to the state but let him come with me into Macedonia...¹⁹¹

According to Cohen's model, the civilian authorities must be free to intervene in military matters. How then, can an American president effectively make military decisions if he or she is not "embarked in the same ship" or a "sharer of the same danger?" It was not feasible for

¹⁹¹ Schlesinger, Arthur M., and Richard H. Rovere. 121

Truman to fly to the Pacific theater to personally command the troops while under MacArthur's professional advisement; Wake Island alone took him three days to travel. It could not be done. Washington had to put its full trust in the theater commander, as he could not be micromanaged from 7,000 miles away. Placing restriction after restriction on his tactics only made the situation worse. The poor exchange between field intelligence in the Pacific and CIA intelligence in Washington would further set MacArthur up for failure. While policymakers in Washington could not be enlightened on MacArthur's tactical perspective, the general was equally ignorant on the state of the world outside of the Far East. Even in the one instance when Truman sent Averill Harriman to brief MacArthur for three days on U.S. foreign policy, it was still irregular and largely ineffective.

Fortunately, modern technology has fixed many of the above civil-military issues that crippled the U.S. effort during the Korean War. With the development of satellites and the creation of the White House Situation Room, civil-military relations have become much more efficient. As of the 21st century, an American president can easily fulfill General Paulus's vision of being "counselled chiefly by persons of known talent... who are present at the scene of action," through virtual means. Modern technology allows the president, along with all of his or her experts in Washington, to be present at the scene of action without any security or logistical concerns. It also allows for briefings back and forth between the generals in the field and the statesmen at home. Only under this arrangement was President Barack Obama able to order a successful "surgical raid" of Osama Bin Laden's compound in 2011 during Operation Neptune Spear. The president was able to make a decision that simultaneously welcomed and dismissed different tactical recommendations from various professionals. In a showing of full professional

cohesion, Obama was able to personally supervise the operation from the Situation Room via the Situation Room. His decision was a lonely one, as not every statesman or general in the room agreed with it; it was a decision that only he, the commander-in-chief, could make, having been briefed by military professionals in Washington and Pakistan. The president, prepared to accept the blame if the raid failed, was the one who pulled the trigger from 7,000 miles away.

In the context of foreign affairs, neorealist Kenneth Waltz argues that there are three images of international relations, the first one being the individual. In the first image, war comes from selfishness, misdirected aggressive impulses, and stupidity, all on behalf of individual actors.¹⁹² This can also be applicable to civil-military relations, in which the interplay between soldiers and statesmen can be reduced to temperament. Military professionalism is either hindered or rejected altogether if there is conflict on the interpersonal level. MacArthur did not respect his commander in chief as a person or a statesman. Had Truman and MacArthur been best friends, the general would have felt less inclined to be insubordinate. This highlights a fundamental issue that cannot be remedied by technology; the effects of human temperament are always paramount.

Temperament continues to affect military professionalism in the 21st century. In June 2010, Army General Stanley McChrystal was relieved from command after mocking civilian government officials, including Vice President Joe Biden, in a *Rolling Stone* article. While he was not critical of U.S. policy, he did voice his personal disappointment in President Obama. In accepting McChrystal's resignation, the president emphasized that he did not do so over a difference in policy: "The conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the

¹⁹² Waltz, Kenneth N. *Man, the State and War: a Theoretical Analysis*. 1959. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press), 16.

standard that should be set by a commanding general. It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system. And it erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan.”¹⁹³ Unlike MacArthur, General McChrystal was on the same page as the president politically. The latter general chose to be direct in making himself vocal of his personal distaste for his civilian authorities at the expense of his professionalism, something MacArthur only did indirectly.

The following administration saw the inverse problem; an American president who did not always get along with his generals. In a meeting at the Pentagon in summer 2017, President Donald Trump attacked top military officials as “losers” and “a bunch of dopes and babies” over their role in recent wars in the Middle East. He went on to claim that “you don’t know how to win anymore,”¹⁹⁴ implying that he was no longer interested in their professional advice or expertise. While civil-military relations have come a long way since the many wars of Douglas MacArthur, temperament will always be a question in the wars of tomorrow.

¹⁹³ Hertzberg, Hendrik. “MacArthur Was Offline. McChrystal Wasn't.” *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/hendrik-hertzberg/macarthur-was-offline-mcchrystal-wasnt>.

¹⁹⁴ III, Leo Shane. “Trump Blasted Top Military Generals as 'a Bunch of Dopes and Babies' According to New Book.” *Military Times*, January 17, 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/01/17/trump-blasted-top-military-generals-as-a-bunch-of-dopes-and-babies-according-to-new-book/>.

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