

# CIVIL WAR OF A SORT :

## The International Origins of the Korean Conflict

James I. Matray

美 뉴멕시코대

President Harry S. Truman never had any trouble explaining the origins of the Korean War. "Communism," he stated frankly in his memoirs, "was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier."<sup>1</sup> As Ernest R. May has shown, it was the lessons of the 1930's that had created an axiom dominating Truman's thinking in reaction to the North Korean invasion of South Korea.<sup>2</sup> If the United States did nothing to prevent the Communists from conquering all of Korea, this only would encourage more acts of aggression. International developments before World War II proved that appeasement, far from halting an aggressor, merely guaranteed a future war under tougher circumstances. Truman's advisors almost universally shared his judgment that the conflict in Korea was the direct result of the global expansionist strategy that the Soviet Union had followed since 1945. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, for example, later claimed that Moscow's "dagger thrust pinned a warning

---

1) Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, II : Years of Trial and Hope*(Garden City : Doubleday, 1956), 333.

2) Ernest r. May, "The Nature of foreign Policy : The Calculated Versus the Axiomatic," *Daedalus*, 91(Fall 1962), 662~663.

notice on the wall which said; "give up or be conquered!"<sup>3)</sup> A lone dissenter at that time was Soviet expert George F. Kennan, who considered the Korean War "a civil conflict, not an international one; and the term 'aggression' in the usual international sense was... misplaced."<sup>4)</sup>

Forty years after the outbreak of the Korean War the main explanation of its origins has changed dramatically. An excellent illustration of this analytical shift appears on the first page of Callum MacDonald's *Korea; The War Before Vietnam*. There, the author asserts that the North Korean "attack was the latest act in a civil war which had been taking shape since the liberation of Korea from Japan in 1945." Burton I. Kaufman, in his recent study entitled *The Korean War; Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command*, labels the conflict "a true civil war." Even Peter Lowe, who strives in his *The Origins of the Korean War* to assess the conflict in light of international developments, concludes that by 1950, "the situation in the Korean peninsula was in essence one of civil war." Most recently, John Merrill has charged that previous explanations for the Korean War have ignored the "local setting." In his *Korea; The Peninsular Origins of the War*, he asserts that "the war can be usefully interpreted as a case of intervention in the ongoing civil strife in the South."<sup>5)</sup>

These works reflect an interpretational trend that began in 1981 with the publication of Bruce Cumings's influential book entitled *The Origins of the*

---

3) Dean G. Acheson testimony, U.S. Congress, Senate, Joint Committee on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Military Situation in the Far East*, 81st Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), 1715, 1936.

4) George F. Kennan, *Memoirs*, I : 1925~1950 (Boston : Little, Brown, 1967), 490.

5) Callum MacDonald, *Korea : The War Before Vietnam* (New York : The Free Press, 1986), 3 ; Burton I. Kaufman, *The Korean War : Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1986), 32 ; Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War* (London : Longman, 1986), 68 ; John Merrill, *Korea : The Peninsular Origins of the War* (Newark : University of Delaware Press, 1989), 21.

Korean War. Relying upon meticulous and exhaustive research in both American and Korean sources, Cumings contents that "the origins of the Korean War must be sought primarily in the events of the period 1945 to 1950 and secondarily in forces descending upon Korea in the period of colonial rule that left their peculiar stamp on the interwar years..."

As elsewhere in Asia, revolutionary nationalism was the primary political force on the Korean peninsula even before the end of World War II. Those favoring radical change were the leaders of a movement dedicated to the destruction of Japanese colonialism, as well as Korea's traditional system of political, social, and economic privilege. The United States, however, was determined to prevent a leftist victory in Korea because its "goal was American hegemony in the postwar world." For Cumings, Truman's decision in 1945 to occupy the southern half of the Korean peninsula constituted "an unprecedented act of ambition" and "the first postwar act of containment." U.S. occupation officials purposely followed a counter-revolutionary course, supporting the political aspirations of the conservatives and attempting "through unilateral actions to build a bulwark against communism."<sup>61</sup> Had the U.S. not intervened in Korea's civil war, the popular preference for revolutionary political and economic change would have resulted in the establishment of a communist government to rule a united Korea.

Few writers have embraced the Cumings interpretation in its entirety. Nevertheless, in response to *The Origins of the Korean War*, a consensus has emerged that the Korean War had domestic origins and was in essence a civil conflict. However, this interpretation, much like Truman's in June 1950, offers an oversimplified answer to a considerably more complex question. International factors play a far more significant role in explaining the outbreak of hostilities in Korea than recent scholars have been willing

---

6) Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the establishment of Separate Regimes, 1945~1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), XX, XXXIV~XXX, 116, 130~131.

to admit. Perhaps more important, the domestic origins argument has tended assign blame for the Korean War almost exclusively to the United States. Yet the real villain in the last century of Korea's history was Japan. If Japan had not conquered Korea in 1905 and incorporated the peninsula into its colonial empire, there would have been no war in 1950. Japan's attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941 would have a significant indirect impact on Korea. war with the U.S. meant that eventual Allied occupation of Korea in<sup>7)</sup> some form was inevitable. Postwar isolation from international affairs was not a realistic expectation for Korea because ending World War II would require either destroying Japanese forces on the peninsula or accepting their surrender. Ultimate responsibility for Soviet-American partition of Korea at the 38th parallel in 1945 and the resulting War five years later therefore rests with Imperial Japan.

Wartime negotiations among the Allies suggest that a Soviet-American dispute over Korea's postwar fate, in contrast to military occupation, was far from inevitable. In fact, as this paper will attempt to demonstrate, there were at least four occasions between July 1945 and April 1948 when Washington and Moscow might have taken steps that would have resulted in Korea's reunification. In each case, however, international factors would block the implementation of an agreement, as Korea became a captive of the cold War. Neither the U.S. nor the Soviet Union would accept a solution aimed at ending the partition because this might allow its adversary to dominate a reunited Korea. "The ultimate result of a great power rivalry," as Callum MacDonald has observed, "was to institutionalise sic the civil war in two contending states, both committed to the cause of unification."<sup>8)</sup> Having created two Koreas, both the Americans and the Soviets then

---

7) In 1986, Bruce Cumings told me at a conference that after World War II, the Allies should have set up a protective shield around Korea so that its people could determine their own destiny without outside interference.

8) MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam*, 15.

provided enough support for each side to threaten its rival. Korean leaders in the north and the south could develop plans for achieving reunification through a resort to force only because their patrons provided them with the means to wage war. Thus, it was international developments that created the circumstances making possible the outbreak of Korea's civil war.

Few average Americans, let alone any informed observers, would have predicted in 1942 that U.S. combat forces would be fighting in Korea less than a decade later. In fact, before the first year of U.S. participation in World War II was over, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had embraced a policy that sought to prevent a postwar conflict on the Korean peninsula. American officials were aware that Korea, as the strategic focal point of northeast Asia, had been the victim of great power rivalry throughout its history.<sup>9)</sup> Its future after World War II therefore would depend on the ability of the Allies to cooperate in negotiating an agreement that would protect the interests of all nations directly involved in the area. Thus, the State Department developed plans for the creation of an international trusteeship for Korea that would remove this strategically located nation as a potential source of tension and conflict in the postwar world.<sup>10)</sup>

Roosevelt's diplomatic advisors anticipated criticism especially from Korean exiles for not promising immediate independence and self-government after War II, but a number of factors in favor of trusteeship. First, the vast majority of Koreans were poor and illiterate, politically inexperienced, and economically backward. After forty years of Japanese domination, only older citizens could even remember when the Korean people ruled themselves. Second, there were several Korean groups in exile

---

9) Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 161; Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean People's Democratic Republic* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1966), 18.

10) James I. Mattay, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 8.

in the United States, China, and the Soviet Union each claiming to be Korea's legitimate representatives. Given the totality of Japanese control over events on the peninsula, American officials doubted whether any of these contestants had strong organizational backing inside Korea. Finally, as Korea's closest neighbors along with Japan, China and the Soviet Union had interests in that nation's future development. Trusteeship would foster cooperation, rather than competition, in determining Korea's destiny.<sup>11)</sup> During World War II, the Roosevelt administration followed a dual course in pursuit of its objectives in Korea. First, the U.S. withheld recognition and material support from any of the rival Korean exile groups. At a press conference in March 1942, Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles explained that the U.S. policy of impartiality toward all "free movements" applied to Korea. Although Washington had "utmost sympathy" for the cause of Korean nationalism, the Korean case involved certain complex problems that required caution and delay.<sup>12)</sup> Second, the administration sought the approval of Britain, China, and the Soviet Union for a postwar four-power trusteeship arrangement for Korea. impartiality infuriated Korean exiles in the United States and China, but Allied agreement on trusteeship would have been impossible without it. State Department officials were certain that if the U.S. showed a preference for any particular group of Koreans, the Soviet Union would follow suit.<sup>13)</sup> More alarming, Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek already was sponsoring those Korean exiles residing in

---

11) William R. Langdon memorandum, February 20, 1942, Dept. of State Records, 895.01/79, National Archives [NA], Washington, D.C. ; Arthur B. Emmons memorandum, August 14, 1952, *ibid.*, 895.01/156A ; Harold B. Quarton memorandum, August 15, 1942, *ibid.*, 895.01/157.

12) Sumner Welles press conference comments, March 2, 1942, *Foreign Relations of the United States*(FRUS), 1942, I, *General, the British Commonwealth, the Far East* (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 864 ; *New York Times*, March 3, 1942, p.7.

13) Cordell Hull to Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 29, 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, I, 873.

Chungking--the self-styled Korean Provisional Government.<sup>14)</sup> Trusteeship provided the best method for ensuring that the Korean people would choose who would lead them to independence after liberation from Japanese rule.

State Department officials began work on a specific plan for postwar international control over Korea during the autumn of 1942. A projected committee comprised of representatives from China, New Zealand, and the U.S. would develop a plan "to cooperate with the Korean people in setting up and establishing a national government of Korea and ... to assist in forming a temporary trusteeship under which they would be given advice and technical assistance." There also would be measures for coordination with the Soviet Union.<sup>15)</sup> The Roosevelt administration could expect Chinese acceptance of this plan although Chiang knew to prefer Allied recognition of the Korean exiles in China. Enlisting British support would not be so easy because Britain was more interested in answering the broader question of Allied policy in all colonial areas than in planning for Korea's future. Discussions in Washington early in 1943 with Foreign Minister Anthony Eden made it clear that the British thought "very little of a trusteeship and would rather have the full responsibility in the hands of one country." On March 27, Roosevelt told Eden that he favored postwar international control over Indochina and the Japanese-mandated islands. Furthermore, "Korea might be placed under an international trusteeship, with China, the United States and one or two other countries participating." Eden raised no

---

14) Clarence Gauss to Hull, April 18, 1942, *ibid.*, 872~873; Gauss to Hull, December 19, 1942, *ibid.*, *China*(Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 748; Gauss to Hull, June 19, 1942, Dept. of State Records, 895.01/148, NA; Roy P. McNair, Jr. to War Department, December 11, 1942, *ibid.*, 895.01/228; McNair Report, January 12, 1943, *ibid.*, 895.01/216; Gauss to Hull, January 15, 1943, *ibid.*, 895.01/213.

15) Division of Far Eastern Affairs memorandum, October 10, 1942, Dept. of State Records, 895.00/840, NA.

objections, conveying the impression of British support.<sup>16)</sup>

Undersecretary Welles briefed Chinese Ambassador T. V. Soong on the results of these Anglo-American negotiations that same month. Roosevelt and Eden, he explained, had agreed on a trusteeship for Korea, but the specific features of the plan would await consultations with the Soviet Union.<sup>17)</sup> Confident of British and Chinese backing, the state Department finished a specific proposal with details about the machinery to implement, supervise, and finance a program under which Korea would "be temporarily administered..." anticipating independence probably with close economic ties to China."<sup>18)</sup> There was some concern that the Soviet Union might not cooperate with a trusteeship scheme. Moscow maintained close ties with Korean guerrillas in Siberia, who would provide an excellent vehicle for exerting Russian influence in postwar Korea.<sup>19)</sup> Without an agreement among the Allies that provided for a neutral Korea, a postwar Sino-Soviet contest for control over the peninsula was probable. Much to the relief of the Roosevelt administration, a meeting of the Allied foreign ministers in Moscow during October 1943 provided indirect evidence of the Soviet Union's willingness to endorse a Korean trusteeship. There, Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov responded favorably when the U.S. proposed widespread application of the trusteeship principle to resolve the fate of de-

---

16) Harry Hopkins memorandum, March 22, 1943, and Hull memorandum, March 27, 1943. *FRUS*, 1943, III : *The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East* (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office 1963), 34-37 ; Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, II (New York : Macmillan, 1948), 1235~1236, 1595~1596.

17) Welles memorandum, March 29, 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, *China* (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), 845~846.

18) Memorandum on International Trusteeship, April 15, 1943, *FRUS*, *The Conferences at Washington and Quebec*, 1943 (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 720~726.

19) Stanley Hornbeck Memorandum, August 19, 1943, reel 23, folder 159, box 51-52. Cordell Hull papers, Library of congress, Washington, D.C.

pendent peoples.<sup>20)</sup>

One of Roosevelt's objectives when he traveled to the Cairo Conference in November 1943 was to remove any possibility for a future war in Korea. He hoped to obtain formal British and Chinese consent for an international trusteeship arrangement in postwar Korea that would guarantee the eventual achievement of independence and self-government. The president's efforts were rewarded, as Winston Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek joined Roosevelt in issuing the famous Cairo Declaration, which promised the liquidation of the Japanese Empire. With respect to Korea, this statement declared that the Allies, "mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent."<sup>21)</sup> Roosevelt recognized that postwar peace and stability on the Korean peninsula would depend not only upon the support of Britain and China, but also the Soviet Union for joint action regarding Korea's reconstruction. Thus, he left Cairo for his meeting with Joseph Stalin at Teheran in tent upon gaining the Russian leader's assent for a Korean trusteeship. On November 30, Stalin voiced approval for the Cairo Declaration. Roosevelt later avowed that the Soviet leader had agreed specifically that "the Koreans are not yet capable of exercising and maintaining independent government and that they should be placed under a 40 year tutelage."<sup>22)</sup>

During the spring of 1944, the State Department's Postwar Programs

---

20) Hull, *Memoirs*, II pp.1304~1305 ; *Conference Notes, October 29, 1943, FRUS, 1943, I, 666~667.*

21) "Conference of President Roosevelt, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and Prime Minister Churchill in North Africa," *Department of State Bulletin, IX* (December 4, 1943), 393 ; Roosevelt-Churchill meeting notes, November 24, 1943, British draft declaration, n. d., and American draft declaration, n. d., *FRUS, The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran, 1943*(Washington, D. C. : U. S. Government Printing Office 1961), 389, 400, 404.

22) Conference notes, November 30, 1943, and Pacific War Council notes, January 12, 1944, *FRUS, Cairo and Teheran, 566, 869.*

Committee discussed and approved three papers outlining a concrete plan for the occupation and administration of postwar Korea. Securing formal Soviet consent for these plans assumed greater importance with each Allied military victory over the Axis that year. This was the case because U.S. military experts had convinced Roosevelt that Soviet participation in the Pacific war would make the defeat of Japan much easier, perhaps removing the need to invade the home islands.<sup>231</sup> At first, Roosevelt's advisors feared that without prior territorial arrangements, such as a trusteeship for Korea, Soviet entry into the war against Japan might set the stage for a postwar Sino-Soviet conflict. But political factionalism and economic deterioration in China sharply altered the administration's expectations. If Chiang Kai-shek's regime lacked sufficient strength and viability to counter future Soviet expansionist ambitions in Asia, firm agreements were essential.<sup>241</sup> Consequently, when Roosevelt left for his meeting at Yalta with Churchill and Stalin early in 1945, his main objective was to confirm plans for Soviet entry into the Pacific War, but he also sought an accord that would produce a strong China and an independent Korea.

In preparation for the Yalta conference, State Department officials had drawn up specific plans for Korea that placed a high priority on joint Allied participation in the occupation and civil administration of the peninsula. If the Allies expected to avoid prolonged occupation or any delay in granting independence, there should be a detailed agreement for the establishment

---

23) Department of State memorandum, March 29, 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V : *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa-The Far East* (Washington, D. C. : U. S. Government Printing Office 1965), 1225~1242 ; *Postwar Programs Committee minutes, 27th Meeting, May 3, 1944, Postwar Programs Committee Minutes, February 1-May 31, 1944, box 32, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. papers, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia ; William D. Leahy, I Was There* (New York : McGraw-Hill, 1950), 250~259.

24) Policy Committee minutes, 47th meeting, May 19, 1944, Policy Committee Minutes, box 370, Stettinius papers ; Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. to Joseph Grew, May 5, 1944, box 216, *ibid.*

of a four-power trusteeship.<sup>25)</sup> On February, Roosevelt raised the issue of Korea during discussions with Stalin at Yalta and proposed a three-power trusteeship, suggesting the exclusion of Britain. The president speculated that international control would last twenty to thirty years. Stalin responded that the shorter the duration the better, then arguing in favor of British participation. He also asked about the stationing of foreign troops on the peninsula; both men agreed that there should be no postwar military occupation of Korea.<sup>26)</sup> Roosevelt and Stalin therefore agreed to a four-power trusteeship for Korea in addition to the concessions the Soviet Union would receive in return for participation in the Pacific war. Given the events at Yalta, Roosevelt and his advisors had every reason to believe that China and eventually Korea would emerge as independent and sovereign nations after World War II.

Unfortunately, neither Roosevelt nor Stalin anticipated that the defeat of Japan would follow so quickly after Allied victory in Europe. As a result, the two leaders had not discussed trusteeship in detail at Yalta. They had decided instead that a five-member committee, composed of representatives from member nations on the proposed Security Council of the United Nations, would meet prior to the San Francisco Conference to discuss the terms of an international system. As the Soviet<sup>27)</sup> Union established political control over Eastern Europe following Yalta, some U.S. leaders became fearful that Stalin would pursue "sovietization" in Asia as well. Henry L. Stimson and James V. Forrestal, secretaries of war and navy respectively,

---

25) Briefing Book paper, "Inter-Allied Consultation-Korea," n. d., *FRUS*, 1945, *The Conferences at Malta and Yalta* (Washington, D. C. : U. S. Government Printing Office, 1955), 358~361.

26) Charles E. Bohlen minutes, February 8, 1945, *ibid.*, 770.

27) Yalta communique, "Territorial Trusteeship," *FRUS*, 1945, *The Conference of Berlin* (Potsdam), Vol. II (Washington, D. C. : U. S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 1568.

in fact had serious doubts about Roosevelt's entire approach toward the reconstruction of colonial areas. Both men worried that the U.S. would surrender areas of strategic importance in the Pacific but other nations would not follow suit. During a cabinet meeting on March 9, 1945, Roosevelt dismissed these concerns and reaffirmed his support for a system of trustee nations that would derive authority from the proposed international organization. That<sup>28)</sup> same month, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) formulated a detailed program for the occupation and interim administration of Korea. By early<sup>29)</sup> April 1945, American plans for Korea's transition from liberation to trusteeship were virtually complete.

International developments would rob Korea of perhaps its best chance to prevent the three year war that would start in June 1950. After the Yalta Conference, Stalin's determination to establish hegemony in Eastern Europe had caused Roosevelt to question the Soviet leader's willingness to fulfill Allied agreements. This emerging Soviet-American dispute raised doubts about the wisdom of trusteeship for Korea. Nevertheless, when the president died on April 12, he still was optimistic about the chances for continued Soviet-American cooperation despite sharp differences over such issues as the fate of Poland. Once Harry Truman assumed the presidency, any foundation for postwar<sup>30)</sup> Soviet-American cooperation quickly

---

28) Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York : Harper and Row, 1947), 556~557 ; Cabinet meeting minutes, March 9, 1945, and James V. Forrestal memorandum, March 30, 1945, in Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York : Viking Press, 1951), 33, 77-78).

29) SWNCC PAPERS 76, 77, 78, 99, 101, March 19, 1945, Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] Records, CCS 383.21 Korea(3-19-45), sec. I Record Group [RG] 218, NA, Washington, D.C.

30) John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1972), 172~173 ; Robert H. Ferrell, "Truman's Foreign Policy : A Traditional View," in Richard Kirkendall, ed., *The Truman Era as a Research Field : A Reappraisal, 1972* (Columbia : University of Missouri Press, 1974), 26.

disappeared. The new president, to a far greater degree than Roosevelt, was suspicious of Soviet intentions and expected Stalin's actions in Asia to parallel his expansionist policies in Eastern Europe. Less than one week after taking office, Truman reversed Roosevelt's position on the territorial trusteeship issue. The U.S. now would resist any detailed discussion of the machinery for an international trusteeship system at the San Francisco Conference.<sup>31)</sup> Truman's decision reflected his intense fears of "sovietization" in Asia and signaled the beginning of a search for an alternative in Korea that would eliminate any opportunity for Soviet expansionism.

Korea's fate ultimately was tied to American military capabilities and Truman's strategy for defeating Japan. One month after Roosevelt's death, U.S. military advisors still believed that Soviet entry into the Pacific war was essential.<sup>32)</sup> This advice forced Truman reluctantly to revive plans for joint Allied control of Korea, since unilateral U.S. occupation of the peninsula seemed impossible. Thus, when the new president dispatched Harry Hopkins to Moscow in May 1945 for discussions with Stalin, one purpose was to reach a firm agreement on Korea. Hopkins received instructions from the State Department to obtain among other specific provisions Soviet approval for a trusteeship which guaranteed equal representation in the Allied civil administration of postwar Korea. But at Moscow, Hopkins failed to discuss Korea's future in detail. He merely reminded Stalin that at Yalta, he and Roosevelt had agreed to a four-power trusteeship, but did not specify its duration. Hopkins then suggested that the period of international guidance might last as long as 25 years, but

---

31) "International Trusteeship" memorandum, April 18, 1945, Memoranda for the President, box 735, Stettinius papers; Stettinius to Andrei Gromyko, June 23, 1945, *FRUS*, Berlin, II, 634.

32) Herbert Feis, *The Atomic bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 7.

certainly a minimum if five years. Stalin avoided a discussion of specifics as well, but he restated his unqualified endorsement of a four-power trusteeship for Korea.<sup>33)</sup>

Stalin's comments to Hopkins provided little evidence that the Soviet leader intended to undermine plans for a Korean trusteeship. In fact, he reaffirmed his support during consultations with T. V. Soong in July 1945 regarding the development of a postwar Sino-Soviet treaty ratifying the Yalta agreement on the Far East. After Stalin raised the issue of Korea, Molotov commented that the Korean trusteeship proposal was unusual and unprecedented, thus requiring a detailed understanding among the Allied nations most concerned about Korea's future.<sup>34)</sup> The Soviet Union almost certainly expected to finalize the specific terms of an arrangement at the Potsdam Conference later that month. The U.S. State Department shared this with it on, having formulated a policy position paper in anticipation of the upcoming meeting. Alarming, the report predicted that Moscow would "probably occupy all or part of Korea" and insist upon establishing a friendly government composed of exiles trained in the Soviet Union. poor economic conditions in postwar Korea would encourage a favorable reception of Communist ideology, increasing the likelihood of popular support for a Soviet-sponsored socialist regime.<sup>35)</sup>

While Stalin had shown consistent support for a Korean trusteeship, Truman never had been enthusiastic about the plan. Finally, the president

---

33) Joseph C. Grew to Forrestal, May 21, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VII : *The Far East : China*(Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office 1969), 882-883 ; Memorandum of conversation, May 28, 1945, *FRUS*, Berlin, I, 47.

34) Averell Harriman to James F. Byrnes, July 3, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VII, 914 ; Harriman to Byrnes, July 9, 1945, *FRUS*, Berlin, I, 234.

35) State Department policy paper, June 22, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VI : *The British Commonwealth, the Far East*(Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 561~564.

found an alternative. On the day of his arrival at Potsdam, he received news of the successful testing of the atomic bomb. Stimson recorded in his memoirs that at this point, Truman began "losing his interest" in Soviet entry into the Pacific war. Both<sup>36)</sup> Truman and newly appointed Secretary of State James F. Byrnes immediately concluded that employing the atomic bomb against Japan would end the war quickly, preempting a Soviet declaration of war. While the main reason for using the bomb was to save American lives, Truman and Byrnes surely must have perceived the indirect diplomatic and strategic benefits. If Japan surrendered prematurely, the U. S. could avoid the many anticipated complications entailed in Russian participation in the postwar reconstruction of Asia. It also would permit the U.S. to occupy Korea unilaterally and avoid the distasteful necessity for trusteeship.

Washington's Korea policy thus experienced a remarkable transformation during the Potsdam Conference. Ignoring planning papers, American military leaders agreed to nothing specific regarding the multinational occupation of Korea. Truman and his diplomatic advisors also discarded trusteeship in anticipation of a rapid end to the Pacific war that would forestall Soviet occupation. At the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting on July 23, Byrnes joined Eden in opposing detailed discussion of trusteeship. Molotov agreed to table his proposal, on the condition that the summary report at least note Moscow's raising of the issue. But when the Allies drafted the Final Protocol, both Byrnes and Eden opposed the inclusion of a general statement on trusteeship. And so, the conference report noted only that the Allies had examined the trusteeship issue but referred specifically to the Italian colonies alone.<sup>37)</sup> Despite Moscow's genuine

---

36) Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War*, p. 637.

37) Council of Foreign Ministers meetings minutes, July 23 and August 1, 1945, Soviet draft proposal on trusteeship, n.d., State Department minutes, August 1, 1945, and Potsdam Protocol, August 1, 1945, *FRUS, Berlin, II*, 282-283, 550-551, 593, 1493, 1594-1595.

desire to reach an accord at Potsdam, the conference produced no definite agreement on Korea. Perhaps the last chance to avert the Korean War had been lost.

William Stueck has argued that trusteeship did not offer a workable solution to the Korean problem, because neither the Allies nor the Korean exiles would cooperate in implementing the scheme.<sup>38)</sup> We shall never know for certain whether trusteeship was doomed to fail. It is clear, however, that Truman's decision to abandon trusteeship had unfortunate consequences; it led to Korea's partition and the establishment of two governments bent on forcible reunification of the peninsula. Two days after the first U.S. atomic attack on Japan, the Soviet Union entered the Pacific war and sent the Red Army into Korea. Only Soviet acceptance of Truman's eleventh hour proposal for Korea's division at the 38th parallel into zones of military occupation prevented Russian control over the entire country.<sup>39)</sup> But the U.S. refusal to finalize terms for a trusteeship meant that there were no guidelines for coordination in the postwar administration of Korea. Worse still, once the Soviet Union and the United States each occupied half of the peninsula, ending the artificial division would require a diplomatic agreement. With Soviet-American relations experiencing a steady and serious deterioration in Europe, it was clear that neither Stalin nor Truman would be in the mood to compromise.

American occupation forces arrived in southern Korea on September 8, 1945, nearly a month after Russian troops had entered the north. Within a month, the U.S. confronted agonizing problems in Korea. "Sovietization"

---

38) William Stueck, "The United States and Korea," *Reviews in American History*, XIV 3 (September 1986), 457~458. Bruce Cumings has offered an entirely different judgment. Trusteeship, he argues, was a "paternalistic, gradualist . . . idea that deemed no colonial people fit to run their own affairs without a period of tutelage," Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, p. 106.

39) Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, pp. 43~47.

north of the 38th parallel already seemed well under way, while there had been little success in the south in controlling anti-imperialist agitation and revolutionary nationalism.<sup>40)</sup> Within a few days after occupation began, the Truman administration realized that without a negotiated settlement, it faced a painful choice: either prolonged military occupation and permanent partition or withdrawal and Soviet domination of the entire peninsula. By mid-September, the SWNCC had revived the trusteeship formula and had begun work on a specific proposal.<sup>41)</sup> Washington remained hopeful as well that Moscow would agree locally to coordination in the implementation of uniform occupation policies. But during early October, the War Department received word that the Soviet occupation commander still was spurning substantive negotiations. Faced with Moscow's intransigence, the Truman administration decided to approach the Soviet government with a proposal that ultimately would offer a second chance to avert the Korean War.<sup>42)</sup>

By October 18, the State Department had finished its proposal and had obtained approval from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The plan provided that Washington would open negotiations with Moscow as soon as possible for coordination of occupation policy in Korea, removal of the 38th parallel partition, and establishment of an international trusteeship. In Moscow, Ambassador Averell Harriman received instructions on November 3 to approach the Soviets with a request to end the 38th parallel as "a closed barrier." The U.S. also desired adequate and regular delivery of coal and electric power to the south, uniform fiscal policies, coastwide shipping, orderly resettlement of displaced persons, and the resumption of interzonal

---

40) Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 47~51.

41) *War Department memoranda, September 18, 30, 1945, Dept. of the Army Records, OPD 014.1 TS, sec. , RG 319, NA.*

42) *JCS 1483 12, October 3, 1945, JCS Records, CCAC 014 Korea, sec. , RG 218, NA; Douglas MacArthur to JCS, October 11, 1945, FRUS, 1945, VI, 1071~1072; John R. Hodge to War, October 12, 1945, Dept. of the Army Records, OPD Korea, sec. I, RG 319, NA.*

trade and communications. Harriman was to ask the Soviet government to grant its occupation commander the power to negotiate locally for the realization of Korean independence.<sup>43)</sup> Harriman immediately complied with this directive, but there was no change in Soviet policy.

Truman now decided that the only alternative was to formally raise the issue of Korea at the next meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers scheduled for December 1945 in Moscow. During these negotiations, the U. S. would propose "establishing an international control of Korea for a period of five or more years in preparation for self-government" and recommend that "assent of China and the Soviet Republics should be obtained through diplomatic channels."<sup>44)</sup> As a prelude to the Moscow Conference, the State Department announced that the U.S. intended to approach the Soviet Union again in an effort to reestablish "communications, trade, and free passage of individuals" between northern and southern Korea. If Moscow approved, this would open the way to the reunification and independence of Korea. By late November, the SWNCC had formulated a detailed policy paper on Asia for the upcoming meeting. The U.S., the paper advised, should anticipate and accept the Russian desire for inordinate influence in Korea. Trusteeship offered the best method for lessening the likelihood of Soviet domination, reducing tensions in northeast Asia, and permitting American withdrawal. But if Stalin insisted upon exclusive control, the U.S. should terminate any further talks about trusteeship and grant Korean self-government.<sup>45)</sup>

---

43) SWNCC to Byrnes, October 24, 1945 and Byrnes to Harriman, November 3, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VI, 1093~1103, 1106~1109.

44) William D. Leahy diary entry, November 11, 1945, Diaries 1945, box 5, William D. Leahy papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

45) "United States Forces in Korea," *Department of State Bulletin*, X III (November 18, 1945), 812~813; Memorandum for JCS, December 11, 1945m JCS Records, CCS 383.21 Korea(3-19-45), sec. III, RG 218.

Upon arrival at Moscow, Secretary of State Byrnes acted immediately to place the Korean matter on the agenda. The final American proposal called for a trusteeship but did not provide a detailed description of the plan. It focused instead on Harriman's recommendations of November and the vital necessity for local coordination to lift the barrier at the 38th parallel. There was a provision, however, for the possible extension of trusteeship to ten years.<sup>46)</sup> Byrnes requested approval for his proposal, arguing that the creation of a unified administration was the indispensable first step for Korean reunification, trusteeship, and eventual independence. Molotov countered that a general agreement on trusteeship was a prerequisite for any discussion of specific issues relating to Korea's reunification. He requested a copy of the American proposal and time to study its provisions. On December 20, Molotov accepted Byrnes's argument that local discussion of "urgent" questions was needed, but he wanted prior agreement on a long-term trusteeship plan as well. Therefore, he announced that he would distribute a counter proposal that evening. While expressing a desire for cooperation, an impatient Byrnes alleged that the U.S. plan corresponded to "what Stalin had in mind four months ago in Berlin."<sup>47)</sup>

As promised, Molotov later circulated the Soviet proposal on Korea. It contained four specific provisions. First, the major powers would establish a "provisional, democratic Korean government" to undertake all necessary measures for the development of Korean industry, transportation, agriculture, and culture. Second, representatives from Soviet and U.S. occupation forces would form a "Joint Commission" to consult with local

---

46) Conference minutes, December 16, 1945, and U.S. proposal on Korea, December 17, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, II : *General : Political Economic Matters* (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 617~621, 641~643.

47) Conference minutes, December 20, 1945, *ibid.*, 697~698.

Korean parties and social organizations to formulate procedures for the creation of a provisional government. Third, the Soviet-American Joint Commission would "work out measures of help and assistance (trusteeship) in the political, economic, and social progress" of Korea toward democratic self-government and independence. It also would formulate a five-year trusteeship plan and submit it for approval to the four major powers. Finally, within two weeks, the Soviet and American occupation commanders would convene a "Joint Conference" to answer "urgent questions" and begin permanent coordination of administration.<sup>48)</sup>

Byrnes approved Molotov's proposal after minor changes. Initially, both the Soviet Union and the U.S. judged the Moscow agreement on Korea as entirely satisfactory. Moscow still desired a united Korea and believed the Korean people favored adopting a socialist system. Yet it would not risk allowing the emergence of an anti-Soviet regime and therefore refused to end the partition of the peninsula before the successful implementation of a specific plan for a provisional government and trusteeship. Byrnes wanted to find a solution to the impasse that would permit U.S. military withdrawal without denying to the Korean people the ability to exercise the right of national self-determination. He accepted the Soviet proposal because its implementation would achieve these goals. Truman's advisors certainly realized that the Moscow agreement would please few Koreans. But temporary outside control seemed the only way to secure Soviet cooperation for the attainment of reunification and eventual self-government.

As expected, news of the trusteeship plan sparked a storm of angry protests in the American zone that bordered on mass hysteria. Extremists held street demonstrations, closed stores and schools, and staged work stoppages. Rowdy youth groups roamed the streets of Seoul intimidating U.S. military government personnel and distributing leaflets and posters decrying trusteeship. By January 1946, conservative leaders had

---

48) Soviet proposal on Korea, December 20, 1945, *ibid.*, 699~700.

organized an "Anti-Trusteeship Committee" dedicated to blocking implementation of the Moscow agreement and restoring Korea's sovereignty at the earliest possible date. At first, the Communists and members of the extreme left joined all Koreans in denouncing trusteeship, but suddenly reversed themselves and became the most outspoken defenders of the Moscow<sup>49)</sup> agreement. During a demonstration on January 3, 1946,<sup>50)</sup> they hastily substituted the word "up" for "down" on their signs, which then read "up with Trusteeship!" Soviet officials undoubtedly had a hand in ordering the switch, but the Communists could hardly have expected the U.S. to endorse their political aspirations if they had opposed trusteeship. More important, the extreme left showed remarkable realism in recognizing that fulfillment of the Moscow agreement offered new hope for reunification and independence.

Soviet-American negotiations at local level to answer "urgent questions" represented an early test of whether the Moscow agreement would resolve the Korean predicament. On January 16, 1946, the Soviet delegation arrived in Seoul and met immediately with U.S. representatives to discuss ending the 38th parallel partition. After fifteen sessions, it was clear that the two delegations interpreted the Moscow agreement differently. The Russians favored coordination of policy and the exchange of goods alone; the Americans complete administrative and economic integration. Nevertheless,<sup>51)</sup> the final Soviet-American agreement on administrative and economic

---

49) Emmons to Byrnes, December 30, 1945, and Hodge to Douglas MacArthur, December 30, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VI, 1152~1154; H. Merrill Benninghoff to Byrnes, January 23, 1946, *ibid.*, VII: *the Far East* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 615~616; *New York Times*, January 14, 1946, p. 2.

50) *New York Times*, December 28, 1945, p. 2; Hodge to War, December 31, 1945n, Dept. of State Records, 740.00119 Control(Korea)/12-3045, NA.

51) *New York Times*, January 16, 1946, p. 2, and January 17, 1946, p. 17; Benninghoff to Byrnes, February 15, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII, 634~636.

coordination constituted an encouraging sign. Rail, truck, and coastwise shipping trade between zones was resumed, and nationwide mail service. In addition, the negotiators agreed to create a permanent liaison between commands and to begin coordination at checkpoints along the 38th parallel. While the Soviets approved the use of uniform radio frequencies, they refused to permit free distribution of newspapers in the north or to allow unified fiscal policies. The Russians flatly rejected joint control over transportation, electric power, and communications, arguing that a definitive arrangement would have to await the creation of a provisional government for all Korea.<sup>52)</sup>

Obviously, Moscow had no intention of weakening its control in the north without assurances that there would be a friendly Korean government after reunification. But there now was reason for optimism about Korea's future. Soviet-American negotiations at the local level had experienced significant progress and the overall Moscow agreement provided a workable formula for ending the partition and eventually achieving an independent Korea. Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, the U.S. occupation commander in Korea, was not so sanguine. He warned Washington that it could expect a similar divergence of interpretation when negotiations began for the creation of a provisional government. As an essential precondition, Hodge believed that the U.S. should insist upon the immediate establishment of complete freedom of speech, press, and movement throughout Korea.<sup>53)</sup> The State Department at first hesitated, but then authorized Hodge to insist

---

52) Hodge to War, February 19, 1946, JCS Records, CCAC 014 Korea (8-24-25), sec. III, RG 218, NA; *New York Times*, February 7, 1946, p.17, and February 8, 1946, p.12; U.S. Department of state, *The Record on Korean Unification, 1943-1960: Narrative Summary with Principal documents*, Far Eastern Series, no.101 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1960), 5~6.

53) Hodge to War, January 22, 1946, JCS Records, CCS 338.21 Korea(3-19-45), sec. III RG 218, NA.

on the right of free expression in consultations at the Joint commission. If Moscow spurned this proposal, Hodge would announce that the Soviet Union was barring free speech and elementary civil liberties. American leaders were confident that popular cretecism of Moscow would then force Stalin to retreat and accept Washington's position.<sup>54)</sup>

Soviet and American representatives met in Seoul on March 20, 1946, for the start of the Joint Commission negotiations. Even before the hard bargaining began, both sides had drawn distinct lines of disagreement. In his opening statement, Colonel General Terenty F. Shtikov declared that the Soviet government was committed to the attainment in Korea of "a true democratic and independent country, friendly to the Soviet Union, so that in the future it will not become a base for an attack on the Soviet Union." Therefore, the Korean provisional government had to reflect not only wide representation but also unqualified support for the terms of the Moscow agreement. In response, Hodge emphasized that the U.S. was determened to see that "a government that corresponds to the views of the majority is established." Only notional self-determination, he argued, could produce "the political, economic, and social progress of the Korean people, the development of democratic self-government and the establishment of the national independence of Korea."<sup>55)</sup> If the Soviet and American delegates could have found a way to reconcile these divergent positions at the Joint Conmission, ther might have been no Korean War.

Shtikov, during the early sessions, resisted the American desire for nationwide consultations; he wanted discussion within each individual zone instead. Later, Shtekov favored consultation only with parties that backed the Moscow agreement. Nonetheless, the negotiators ultinally reached agreement on the first phase of action at the Joint Commission. This stage would include consultation with local parties, consideration of a political

---

54) JCS to MacArthur, February 28, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, **VI**, 644.

55) Hodge to Byrnes, March 22, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, **VI**, 652~653.

platform, recommendation of a charter, and a choice of personnel for the provisional government. The Joint Commission organized three subcommittees to formulate specific measures for attaining each objective.<sup>56)</sup> This spirit of cooperation abruptly disappeared when the negotiators attempted to agree on the Korean parties eligible for consultation. The Soviets were shocked when the U.S. delegation announced that there were 500 legitimate parties in southern Korea eligible for consultation compared to only forty in the north. When Shtikov objected to consulting groups hostile to trusteeship, American representative William R. Langdon retorted that Korean hostility to the Moscow agreement did not constitute an acceptable criterion for determining legitimacy. Byrnes instantly approved the U.S. delegation's decision to resist Moscow's attempt to exclude from consultation those parties belonging to the "Anti-Trusteeship Committee."<sup>57)</sup>

Moscow's behavior at the Joint commission was not surprising. The Soviet Union was exploiting the trusteeship issue as a device to postwar political power. Yet the U.S. was in the unenviable position of insisting upon consultation with those very individuals who sought to undermine the work of the Joint commission. Fears of sovietization dictated the stand of the American delegation. The U.S. believed that the exclusion of the conservatives would ensure a Communist seizure of power.<sup>58)</sup> Surprisingly, the Soviet-American negotiators appeared to have broken the deadlock with the publication on April 18 of a joint communique. The commission agreed to consult all "democratic parties and social organizations which are truly

---

56) John z. Williams to John Carter Vincent, March 25, 1946, Dept. of State Records, 501.BB Korea/3-2546, NA ; Williams to Hugh Borton, April 2, 1946, *ibid.*, 501.BB Korea/4-246 ; *New York Times* March 31, 1946, p.14.

57) Williams to Borton, April 2, 1946, Dept. of State Records, 501.BB Korea/4-246, NA ; Byrnes to Langdon, April 5, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII, 657~658.

58) Byrnes to Langdon, April 16, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII, 660~661 ; Langdon to Byrnes, August 30, 1946, Dept. of State Records, 711.00/8-3046, NA.

democratic in their aims" and would sign a declaration pledging to uphold Soviet-American decisions on creation of a provisional government. More important, the communique included as well a provision requiring all the signatories to accept the trusteeship section of the Moscow agreement.<sup>59</sup>

American officials in Seoul were pleased with the compromise because it seemed to permit consultation with the extreme right. Their optimism was premature. When negotiations resumed, Shtikov advocated exclusion of many prominent conservative leaders because they were affiliated with no specific organized group. The U.S. delegation insisted upon consultation with "all schools of political thought irrespective of our estimate of their popular backing." The Soviet representative raised a more serious barrier when he argued logically that a mere signature on a pledge would provide no guarantee of support for the Moscow agreement. Shtikov stated frankly that he would not sanction consultation with those groups most critical of trusteeship. When the American delegation adamantly upheld the principle of absolute freedom of expression, negotiations reached an impasse.<sup>60</sup> On May 7, Hodge informed Washington that he would propose an adjournment of the Joint Commission the following day sine die, claiming that the only way to achieve Korea's reunification was by "standing firm" and "letting the Soviets make the next move."<sup>61</sup>

For some observers at the time, adjournment of the Joint Commission on May 8 constituted the first step toward civil war. Indeed, during the

---

59) "Communique Issued by U. S. -Soviet Joint Commission on April 18, 1946," *Department of State Bulletin*, XVI (January 27, 1947), 173.

60) Hodge to War, April 20, 1946, dept. of the Army Records, P & O 091 Korea, sec. 1, cases 1-14 box 87, RG 319, NA; Langdon to Byrnes, April 14, 1946, and Acheson to Moscow, Nanking, and Paris embassies, April 25, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII, 660~661; *New York Times*, April 11, 1946, p. 13, April 23, 1946, p. 11, and April 27, 1946, p. 5.

61) Hodge to War, May 7, 1946, JCS Records, Leahy file, Korea 1946-1947, RG 218, NA; Hodge to War, May 9, 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII, 665~667.

spring of 1946, rumors about armed clashes at the 38th parallel increased, while scattered acts of violence were everyday occurrences in the American zone. Responsibility for the Joint Commission's failure and this missed opportunity to avoid the Korean War rests primarily with the Soviet Union. Although there was legal and logical justification for Moscow's position, exclusion of the conservatives from consultation violated the principle of national self-determination. More important, the extreme left definitely would dominate the provisional government even with rightist participation. As Hodge admitted at the time, since "the southern political structure includes almost equally left ... and moderate-rightists, we would either have to nominate an unrepresentative slate for the south or expect its being outnumbered by combined strength of North and south Moscow controlled groups." Because of Soviet inflexibility on the issue of consultations, the U.S. was able to escape this unpleasant predicament.

For a second time, events outside of Korea closed what had seemed to be a promising road leading toward reunification and independence. Early in 1946, Stalin delivered a speech announcing a renewal of the worldwide struggle between communism and capitalism. Shortly thereafter, Churchill, in his Iron Curtain speech, called for accepting this challenge. The Joint Commission failed because the Cold War in Europe now had eliminated any foundation for trust between Moscow and Washington. Soviet suspicion of American motives in Korea was deep and intense, especially after Byrnes, upon his return from the Moscow Conference, announced that a trusteeship for Korea might not be necessary.<sup>64)</sup> Far worse, Hodge was permitting

---

62) *New York Times*, April 11, 1946, p.13, April 17, 1946, p.24, April 26, 1946, p.8, May 8, 1946, p.8, 1946, p.10, and May 9, 1946, p.15.

63) Hodge to War April 20, 1946, Dept. of the Army Records, P & O 091 Korea, sec. I, cases 1-14, box 87, RG 319, NA.

64) James F. Byrnes, "Report by the Secretary of State on the meeting of 1035-1036 ; Memorandum of conversation, January 4, 1946, Dept. of State records, 740.00119 Control(Korea)/1-446, NA.

Korean conservatives to oppose the Moscow agreement. Moscow charged that the U.S. was determined to install anti-Soviet leaders in the provisional government at all costs in order to prevent democracy and subordinate Korea to American political and economic influence. Under no circumstances, one Soviet writer proclaimed, would the Soviet Union permit "imperialist forces" to use Korea "as a base and jumping-off place for a attack on our country."<sup>65</sup> Moscow was confident that time was on its side. Eventually, political violence and economic deterioration in southern Korea would force American withdrawal, opening the way to Communist control over the entire peninsula.

American military leaders were more than willing to leave Korea and satisfy Moscow's expectations. However, Truman refused to abandon Korea because this would inflict serious damage on the international credibility and prestige of the United States. Washington therefore persuaded Moscow to resume deliberations at the Joint commission in May 1947, but nothing had changed. Two months of negotiations failed to produce an answer to the deadlock on consultations.<sup>66</sup> Already, the administration had embraced the containment policy to halt Soviet expansion in Europe. State Department officials now wanted to apply the same approach in Korea, but Congress was unwilling to finance a program of economic aid for a separate government south of the 38th parallel. As a result, Truman's diplomatic advisors had to develop another strategy for ending the Korean stalemate permanently. In July 1947, the State Department finished work on a draft proposal that ultimately would offer Korea a third opportunity to achieve reunification and independence. Although the plan outlined three different scenarios, each provided for referral of the Korean issue to the United

---

65) *New York Times*, May 16, 1946, p.15; Max Beloff, *Soviet Foreign Policy in the Far East* (New York: Oxford University press, 1953), 163.

66) Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, pp.89~120.

Nations.<sup>67)</sup>

In August 1947, Washington submitted its proposal to Moscow. Since the Joint Commission Was unable to implement the Moscow agreement, the U.S recommended the convening of a four-power conference to discuss alternative measures for achieving Korea's reunification and independence. The Truman administration expected and received the Soviet rejection of its proposal early in september. Acting in accordance with the State Department's plan, Truman instructed Secretary of State George C. Marshall to address the U.N. General Assembly during its next session and place the Korea issue on its agenda.<sup>68)</sup> In his speech on September 17, Marshall professed that the main reason for the impasse over Korea was Moscow's adamant stand against the principle freedom of expression. Since Soviet-American negotiations had not led to the fulfillment of past agreements on Korea, Marshall asked for international action to remove this threat to world peace.<sup>69)</sup>

On October 17, Warren R. Austin, the permanent U.S. representative at the U.N., presented the American resolution on Korea and urged swift international approval. Based on a State Department draft, it called for free elections under U.N. supervision no later than March 31, 1948. This legislature, reflecting the two-to-one population superiority of southern

---

67) John M. Allison memorandum, July 29, 1947, and Ad-Hoc Committee to SWNCC, August 4, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, VI: *The Far East and Australasia* (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing, 1974), 734~741.

68) Robert A. Lovett to Walter Bedell Smith, August 21, 1947, and V.M. Molotov to George C. Marshall, September 4, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, VI, 771~776 : "Letter from Acting Secretary of State to the soviet Foreign Minister," *Department of State Bulletin*, XVII (September 7, 1947), 473~475 ; "Korean XVII (September 28, 1947), 623~624.

69) George C. Marshall, "A Program for a More Effective United Nations," *Department of State Bulletin*, XVII (September 28, 1947, 619~620 ; *New York Times*, September 18, 1947, pp.8, 24.

Korea, would formulate a constitution and appoint officials to serve in a provisional government. perhaps most important, the resolution provided for creation of a "United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea" (UNTCOK) comprised of eleven nations to supervise the elections, foster freedom of choice, and report its findings to the General Assembly. a final provision called for Soviet-American withdrawal after the formation of a provisional government. Less than one week later, Moscow submitted a proposal to the U.N. calling for an immediate end to Soviet-American occupation of Korea so that the Korean people could achieve reunification and independence without outside interference.<sup>70</sup> International action-or inaction-would determine once again whether there would be an alternative to war in Korea.

Moscow's proposal for joint military withdrawal helped to crystallize American contingency plans for the creation of a separate government south of the 38th parallel. Hodge was nervous about the consequences of imminent Soviet disengagement from the north. After Russian withdrawal, he feared that the northern puppet army might mount an invasion against the south. The administration was confident, however, that once U.N. representatives were present in Korea, the threat of armed invasion southward virtually would disappear.<sup>71</sup> In another cable, Hodge voiced doubts that the Soviet Union ever would cooperate with the U.N. or permit peaceful reunification. U.S. military withdrawal from Korea therefore would

---

70) Warren R. Austin to Trygve Lie, October 17, 1947, and Austin to Marshall, October 29, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, VI, 832~835; Warren R. *Bulletin*, XVII (October 26, 1947), 820~822; *New York Times*, October 18, 1947, p. 14.

71) T. N. Dupuy memorandum, October 15, 1947, Dept. of the Army Records, P & O 091 Korea, sec. III, cases 16~50, box 87, RG 319, NA; S. L. Scott memorandum, October 16, 1947, *ibid.*, P & O 091 Korea TS, sec. I, pt. I, box 20; William H. Draper to Hodge, October 26, 1947, *ibid.*, P & O 091 Korea, sec. II, pt. I, case 2 only, box 87.

be disastrous unless the administration fulfilled certain conditions. For example, Washington, he advised, had to implement an U.S. supervised five-year rehabilitation program. Once southern Korea developed economic strength and political stability, Hodge predicted that "national feeling among the north Koreans may be aroused and sufficient pressure brought to bear upon the soviets to compel them to permit . . . amalgamation of the two areas." Hodge thought that if the U.S. temporarily tolerated Korea's partition and applied the containment strategy, the Soviet Union would retreat.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2)</sup> Moscow's refusal to cooperate with the U.N. forced the U.S. to adopt this approach, thereby creating two Koreans dedicated to each other's destruction.

Despite Moscow's opposition, the administration's policy at the U.N. experienced rapid progress. On November 4, the organization's political committee approved the American proposal on Korea, which now provided for soviet-American withdrawal from the peninsula within ninety days after the creation of a provisional government. Some administration officials were troubled about appearing unduly hasty, but the Soviet withdrawal proposal gave the Washington no choice. Much to the satisfaction of Truman and his advisors, the General Assembly passed the American-sponsored resolution on November 14 by a wide margin.<sup>73)</sup> American leaders were also happy with the composition of the UNTCOK. Of the nine members, Canada, Australia, China, France, El Salvador, and the Philippines all had close economic, political, and military ties to the U.S. Only Syria and India were likely to hamper the pursuit of American objectives, while the final

---

72) Hodge to JCS, November 21, 1947, Dept. of the Army Records, P & O 091 Korea TS, FW 38, RG 319, NA ; R.F Seedlock memorandum, November 28, 1947, *ibid.*, P & O 091 Korea TS. sec. I, case 1, box 20.

73) Austin to Marshall, November 14, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947m VI, 857~859 ; Seedock memorandum, November 4, 1947, Dept. of the Army records, P & O 091 Korea, sec. III, cases 16~50, box 87, RG 319 NA ; *New York Times*, October 30, 1947, p.24.

member, the Ukraine, probably would decline to serve. Marshall was jubilant. He immediately instructed Hodge to prepare for elections and contact the UNTCOK upon its arrival to establish the specific date for the balloting.<sup>74)</sup>

Many nations endorsed U.N. involvement in the Korean affair with great reluctance. After all, the soviet Union already had announced its refusal to cooperate with efforts to implement the November 14 resolution. H. V. Evatt of Australia, for instance, insisted during discussions with American officials that Korea was a question for Soviet-American resolution or, as a last resort, a Japanese peace conference.<sup>75)</sup> Canada indicated that it would not send a representative to serve on the UNTCOK but chaged its mind after receiving Truman's pesonal plea for cooperation.<sup>76)</sup> Several members of the temporary commission shared these misgivings, but chose nevertheless to travel to Korea in January 1948 hoping to achieve Korean reunification and independence. Moscow's attitude was central to the prospects for the UNTCOK's success. Many observers thought that the Soviets would not defy overwhelming pressure from the world cmmunity for international action. Any reason for optimism vanished, however, when the Ukraine annouced it would not participate in the UNTCOK's activities. At its first meeting, the temporary commission expressed regret over the Ukrainian decision, but quickly agreed to approach each occupation commander with a request for

---

74) *New York Times*, November 5, 1947, p. 26 ; Leon Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Reunification of Korea: The Politics of Field Operations, 1947~1950*(The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 31 ; Marshall to Joseph E. Jacobs, November 17, 1947, and Jacobs to Marshall, November 19, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, VI, 860~862.

75) Gordenker, *The United nations and the Peaceful reunification of Korea*, p. 21 ; Memorandum of conversation, October 28, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, VI, 552~553.

76) Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, pp. 137~139.

cooperation and the release of political prisoners.<sup>77)</sup>

Hodge quickly pledged full support for conducting free and unfettered elections in the U.S. zone. To no one's surprise, the Soviet occupation commander ignored the temporary commission's communication. United Nations Secretary General Trygve Lie then approached the Soviet delegation directly with a plea for cooperation. In reply, Andrei Gromyko reminded Lie that Moscow already had indicated its "negative attitude" toward the UNTCOK's activities. Austin now pressed Lie to declare his advocacy of supervised elections in southern Korea alone.<sup>78)</sup> Moscow's refusal to cooperate in the implementation of the November 14 resolution would lead to the creation of two Koreas and the outbreak of a war for reunification. For a second time, the Soviet Union had blocked a promising avenue leading toward a peaceful resolution of the Korean dispute. Had Moscow agreed to allow nationwide elections, it undoubtedly could have forced the U.S. to accept concessions regarding the elections that would increase the probability of an outcome favoring Soviet interests. Most Koreans were likely to vote for moderate and leftist candidates in any event. As the applications for consultation at the Joint Commission in the summer of 1947 had revealed, conservative parties were in a minority in the south. With the Communists enjoying widespread popularity in the north, there was little chance that free elections would produce an anti-Soviet government for all Korea.<sup>79)</sup>

By the fall 1947, however, there was scant that Stalin would cooperate

---

77) Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Reunification of Korea*, pp. 50~52; *New York Times*, January 10, 1948, p. 4, January 13, 1948, p. 2, January 14m 1948, p. 10, and January 18, 1948, *N*, p. 10.

78) Jacobs to Marshall, January 24, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI: *The Far East and Australasia* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 1085~1086; *New York Times*, January 24, 1948, p. 14.

79) Jacobs to Marshall, June 26, 1947, and Hodge to Marshall, June 26, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, VI, 679~680.

with the U.N.'s efforts to achieve Korea's reunification. A large majority of member nations in the international organization were aligned closely with the United States, making it impossible for Moscow to believe that the U.N. would be fair and impartial. Korea also was the victim of a recent escalation in the intensity of the Soviet-American rivalry. The Truman administration's proposal of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan had placed the Soviet Union on the defensive. Now, Washington seemed to be forcing the issue with respect to Korea as well. Cold War tensions apparently blinded Moscow to the risks involved in a decision to defy the U.N. If the UNTCOK chose to supervise elections in southern Korea alone, this would result in the emergence of a separate government hostile to the Soviet Union, an outcome Moscow consistently had sought to prevent. The conservatives in fact had acted swiftly to exploit Moscow's uncooperative stand, publicly demanding separate elections and the creation of security force in southern Korea prior to American military withdrawal.<sup>80</sup> American leaders had tried since 1945 to prevent a rightist political triumph but now assigned greater importance to establishing a bulwark preventing communist control over the entire peninsula.

Some Korean leaders saw that if elections occurred only in southern Korea, this would transform the 38th parallel into a permanent boundary line dividing two countries. For example, Kim Kyu-sik, whose aspirations for political authority had briefly received American support during 1946, believed that supervised elections in the American zone alone would be a disaster. On the eve of the arrival of the UNTCOK in Korea, the moderate politician had formed a "National Independence Federation" to build support for convening a "North-South conference" to remove the partition of Korea. Only the Koreans themselves, Kim insisted, could end partisan strife and achieve the political unity necessary for peaceful reunification. He predicted

---

80) *New York Times*, January 28, 1948, p. 2; Jacobs to Marshall, January 30, 1948, *FRUS*, VI, 1088~1089.

that the arrival of the temporary would not bring reunification but would instead guarantee Korea's permanent division.<sup>81)</sup> Significantly, Kim managed to enlist the backing of Kim Ku, a staunch conservative and wartime president of the Korean provisional Government. Other political leaders joined the two kims in advocating a "North-South Conference", while organizing opposition to anything less than nationwide elections.<sup>82)</sup> although the chances for success were slim, there now was a fourth final opportunity to avoid the Korean War.

Kim kyu-sik's campaign against separate elections in southern Korea scored an early success during consultations with the UNTCOK. Members of the temporary commission were quite impressed with the strength of his arguments. Kim advised, for example, that if the UNTCOK desired truly free and democratic elections, "it will take considerable time to make necessary preparations." Should Moscow bar entry to the northern zone, the moderate leader strongly urged the UNTCOK to refer the entire matter back to the U.N. Interim Committee for reconsideration. Several of the temporary commission's members were receptive to kim's viewpoint. Thus, a member of the UNTCOK delegates favored a delay until the U.N. commission could confer with the Interim Committee.<sup>83)</sup> Rising violence and disruption in the American zone contributed to this hesitancy. In January 1948, the extreme left organized a "General Strike Committee" to instigate work stoppages and acts of sabotage throughout southern Korea. Within four months, political unrest produced almost three hundred deaths and more than ten thousand imprisonments. Some members of the UNTCOK concluded that these conditions made it impossible to conduct genuinely free and democratic

---

81) Langdon to Marshall, December 30, 1947, Dept. of State Records, 895~01 /12-3047, NA.

82) Jacobs to Marshall, February 10, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1101~1103.

83) Jacobs to Marshall, January 29, 1948, and February 2, 1948. *ibid.*, 1087~1091.

elections south of the 38th parallel.

For American occupation officials, the UNTCOK's refusal to promptly authorize elections in southern Korea was thoroughly unacceptable. The temporary commission, they believed, had to accept the fact that the elections would be imperfect and would exclude the northern Koreans. If the UNTCOK fully endorsed the American policy of attempting to create a separated government as quickly as possible, such dissidents as Kim Kyu-sik and Kim Ku would bow to the inevitable and advocate separate elections as well.<sup>85</sup> Hodge and his political advisor Joseph E. Jacobs both agreed that referral of the Korean issue back to the U.N. would be calamitous. They appealed to Washington to persuade the Interim Committee not to delay the elections any longer. Hodge also informed the administration of his need for more troops to maintain law and order. Unable to supply additional forces, Washington approved General Douglas MacArthur's suggestion to authorize an expansion of the Korean constabulary army to 50,000.<sup>86</sup> The Soviets already had begun to build a powerful military force in the north and now the U.S. opted to follow a similar course in the south. Without this external military support, there would have been no Korean War.

American actions in southern Korea had a decisive impact on Soviet policy in the north. U.S. liaison officers in Pyongyang reported that the northern Koreans were on the verge of promulgating a new constitution for a separate government of their own. On February 16, 1948, the People's Committee proclaimed its intention to form a government representing all Korea within the next few months. In subsequent statements, the northern Koreans condemned the UNTCOK as a tool of the U.S. and called upon

---

84) *New York Times*, February 8, 1948, p.1, and February 8, 1948, p.1.

85) Jacobs to Marshall, February 8, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1095~1097.

86) Jacobs to Marshall, February 10, 1948, *ibid.*, 1099~1101; Jacobs to Marshall, February 9, 1948, Dept. of State Records, 895.01/2-409, NA; White House meeting, February 18, 1948, in Millis, *The Forrestal Diaries*, p.375.

all southern Koreans to resist the creation of separate government.<sup>87)</sup> These events in the north reinforced the reticence of the UNTCOK. Key temporary commission members certain that separate elections would harden the division of Korea and open the way to a bloody civil war. On February 6, the UNTCOK voted to refer the Korean matter to the U.N. Interim Commtter for reconsideration in view of the Soviet Union's uncooperative attitude. In its report, the temporary commission recommended that the U. N. approve the election of consultants alone to assist in determining Korea's destiny. The Indian delegate, K.P.S. Menon, thus traveled to New York carrying a report that contained few specific recommendations from the UNTCOK on how to resolve the Korean predicament.<sup>88)</sup>

World leaders had not failed to notice the marked increase in violence and disruption in southern Korea. In the interests of peace and stability, the Interim Committee thus decided to consider the UNTCOK report earlier than it originally had intended. Members of the Interim Committee surely were aware that sponsoring separate elections would solidify partition of Korea. withdrawal and inaction, on the other hand, would open the way to Communist control throughout the peninsula.<sup>89)</sup> It soon became clear that there was widespread resistance in the U.N. to supervising elections in southern Korea alone. But Washington now was determined to prevent any further delays. Marshall instructed Austin to acquiesce only in a brief adjournment for the examination of the UNTCOK's report. During subsequent deliberations, the American delegation was to insist upon

---

87) Jacobs to Marshall, January 31, 1948, and February 24, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1088~1089, 1129~1131; *New York Times*, February 14, 1948, p.10; *Time*, February 23, 1948, p.34; David Dallin, *Soviet Russia and the Far East*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p.310.

88) Jacobs to Marshall, February 5, 6, 13, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948m VI, 1093~1095, 1109.

89) *New York Times*, February 8, 1948, IV, p.10, February 10, 1948, p.17, and February 13, 1948, p.20.

fulfillment of the November 14 resolution in those areas open to observation. When Menon presented the UNTCOK report, American delegate Philip C. Jessup urged the Interim Committee to authorize elections for a separate government in southern Korea. Menon's response was noncommittal, although he did state that Korea would be ready for independence only following reunification. The Interim Committee now declared a ten-day recess to consider both the UNTCOK report and Jessup's proposal.<sup>90)</sup>

While the Interim Committee studied Menon's recommendations, the administration inaugurated a high-powered campaign to mobilize support for the American position. In cables to Britain and India, Marshall emphasized that the Koreans would not accept mere consultation with U.N. because the vast majority of the populace favored quick elections and immediate independence. Marshall's tactic worked. On February 23, London informed Washington that it would accept Jessup's proposal, disavowing any desire to hinder the accomplishment of American objectives. India concurred as well, in large part because the U.S. promised that elections would produce a government for all Korea and not just the south. Once a legislature had emerged representing two-thirds of the Korean population, Marshall thought that the Soviet Union would have no choice but to recognize its legitimacy. Thus, the U.S. managed to convince two of the most influential members of the Interim Committee that separated elections would promote, rather than prevent, the implementation of the November 14 resolution on Korea.<sup>91)</sup>

On February 24, Jessup formally recommended that the UNTCOK observe elections for representatives to a national assembly in those areas of

---

90) Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Reunification of Korea*, p. 70; Marshall to Langdon, February 20, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1124.

91) Marshall to London, February 21, 1948, London to Marshall, February 23, 1948, Marshall to New Delhi February 24, 1948, and New Delhi to Marshall, February 26, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1124~1125, 1127~1128.

Korea accessible to the temporary commission. He confidently predicted that this measure would bring democracy to the majority of the populace and open the way to Soviet-American military withdrawal. Two days later, the Interim Committee approved Jessup's proposal without amendment. Significantly, two nations with representatives serving on the UNTCOK, Canada and Australia, voted against the resolution, while eleven others abstained.<sup>92)</sup> Jessup's presentation greatly impressed advocates of the American proposal, but Washington's diplomatic maneuvers and the recent Communist coup in Czechoslovakia were the key factors producing the administration's triumph.<sup>93)</sup>

Upon receiving the Interim Committee's new instructions, the UNTCOK convened and scheduled elections for May 9, 1948, despite the absence of Canadian delegate George Patterson. Upon his return from Japan, Canada's representative protested that the Interim Committee had only "recommended" that the temporary commission observe the balloting. His main concern was that Korean moderates and leftists would boycott the elections and thereby guarantee a sweeping victory for the anti-Soviet extreme right. When his colleagues refused to issue a clarification of the decision, Patterson walked out in a huff.<sup>94)</sup>

Menon immediately relented and agreed to reconsider the whole matter. When the UNTCOK reconvened on March 12, the Australian delegate suggested that the temporary commission revoke its original decision in view of the probability of an electoral boycott. Instead, the UNTCOK should

---

92) Austin to Marshall, February 24, 1948, *ibid.*, 1128~1129; *New York Times*, March 27, 1948, p. 1.

93) Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful reunification of Korea*, pp. 71~75; *New York Times*, February 27, 1948, p. 20.

94) Langdon to Marshall, February 20, 1948, and March 10, 11, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1121~1122, 1146~1149; *New York Times*, March 3, 1948, March 9, 1948, p. 12, and March 10, 1948, p. 5.

sponsor the national "North-South Conference" that Kim Kyu-sik had proposed to arrange nationwide elections under international supervision. He spoke vehemently against any action that would reinforce Korea's partition at the 38th parallel. The French delegate disagreed, perhaps with an eye toward ensuring U.S. support for France's policy in Indochina. He urged instead the rapid implementation of the initial decision to supervise separate elections. Syria's representative then offered a compromise: The temporary commission would observe elections in southern Korea alone on May 9, 1948, but only if an atmosphere conducive to freedom of choice existed. In a crucial vote, the UNTCOK approved the Syrian compromise, although Canada and Australia dissented. Thus, the temporary commission discarded the objective of reunification before or through a nationwide election.<sup>95</sup> This decision meant that American occupation officials and rightist politicians in southern Korea would be able to ignore moderate and leftist demands for participation in the "North-South conference."

Nevertheless, the two Kims refused to accept the inevitability of separated elections. They gained renewed optimism in late March when the Northern Democratic Coalition Front formally proposed a "North-South Conference" to organize nationwide elections and secure withdrawal of all foreign troops. This conference would convene in Pyongyang on April 14, and the northerners invited a group of thirteen southern Korean leaders to attend, including Kim Kyu-sik and Kim Ku. Both the Canadian and Australian representatives on the UNTCOK encouraged the two Kims to attend the meeting and even pledged to postpone separated elections in the event of success. Kim Kyu-sik therefore responded favorably to the northern overture, asking Hodge to provide credentials and transportation. Not surprisingly, the

---

95) Langdon to Marshall, Marc 12, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1150~1155; Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Reunification of Korea*, pp. 83~85; *New York Times* Marc 13, 1948. p. 8.

U.S. occupation commander refused either to help or to hinder southern Koreans choosing to participate in the "North-South Conference."<sup>96)</sup>

Prior to his departure, Kim kyu-sik requested that the northern Koreans accept certain conditions, including pledges that the conference would not advocate a dictatorship, nationalization of all industries, foreign military bases, or less than free elections. When the northern Koreans consented, the two kims traveled to pyongyang, arriving in the northern capital on April 21.<sup>97)</sup> After a week of discussions, however, it was clear that the conference was indeed a sham. The constitution and government structure it outlined paralleled closely the soviet system. In addition, the delegates issued a proclamation placing entire blame for the partition at the 38th parallel the U.S. and calling upon all true Korean nationalists to demand the immediate withdrawal of American troops and the UNTCOK. Although Kim kyu-sik was disappointed with the results, he returned to Seoul with a promise from northern leader kim Il-sung that his government would support truly free elections and accept the outcome. In the end, the two kims decided not to participate openly in the upcoming elections in the south.<sup>98)</sup>

Washington now became virtually obsessed with preventing any further delays. When several religious groups requested a one-day postponement, for example, the U.S. refused. Ultimately, the administration grudgingly relented because a solar eclipse was expected on May 9 and Koreans would

---

96) Jacobs to Marshall, March 29, 1948, and April 5, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1162~1163, 1169~117; *New York Times*, March 27, 1948, p.1; *Time*, April 5, 1948, p.29.

97) Jacobs to Marshall, April 30, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1180; *New York Times*, April 21, 1948, p.14, and April 22, 1948, p.2.

98) Jacobs to Marshall, April 30, 1948, and May 3, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1184~1186, 1188~1191; *New York Times*, May 1, 1948, p.1, and May 6, 1948, p.15. Gordonker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful reunification of Korea*, kp.311; Merrill, *Korea*, 70-77.

construe this as a bad omen.<sup>99)</sup> by this time, Washington had decided that a conservative dominated government in southern Korea would serve American interests. Therefore, U.S. occupation officials permitted the right to inaugurate a campaign of intimidation and violence against moderate and leftist politicians. When the southern Korean people cast votes on May 10, the elections produced the resounding victory for the extreme conservatives that everyone expected.<sup>100)</sup> Worsed still, a large number of the victorious candidates, including Syngman Rhee, had been outspoken critics of the Soviet Union since 1945. Just prior to the election, these politicians had been vocal in campaign denunciations of Moscow for obstructionism and diminution of the north.<sup>101)</sup> As a result, there was no question that the new South Korean government would be decidedly anti-Soviet.

On May 31, 1948, the new legislative assembly formally convened in its opening session. Six weeks later, it promulgated a constitution and then elected Rhee as the nation's first president. On August 15, American military government officially ended with the formal establishment of the Republic of Korea(ROK). Although the ROK claimed to represent all Korea, the U.N. extended qualified recognition as the only legitimate government on the peninsula.<sup>102)</sup> The Truman administration had accomplished its goal of creating a separate government in southern Korea, but in doing so was responsible for shattering the last hope for averting the Korean War. Had the U.S. not badgered the Interim Committee and the UNTCOK into

---

99) Langdon to Marshall, March 9, 1948, Dept. of Stated Records, 895.00/3-948, NA ; Marshall to Langdon, March 11, 1948, *ibid.*, 895.00/3-1148 ; Jacobs to Marshall, March 24, 1948, *ibid.*, 501BB Korea/3-2448 ; Jacobs to Marshall, April 4, 1948, *ibid.*, 895.00/4-448 ; *New York Times*, April 4, 1948, p. 11.

100) Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, pp.147~149.

101) *New York Times*, May 29, 1948, p. 4 ; Jacobs to Marshall, May 19, 1948. *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1201~1202.

102) Matray, *The reluctant Crusade*, pp.156~165.

sanctioning separate elections, the U.N. might have assumed primary responsibility for arranging a "North-South Conference" held in Seoul rather than Pyongyang. Popular pressure on both sides of the 38th parallel for national elections then might have persuaded the Soviets to permit northern participation. If not, at least Moscow would have been unable to assign blame to the U.S. and the U.N. for permanently dividing Korea through separate elections.

Meanwhile, political developments in the north were moving along the same path as those in the south. On July 10, Kim Il-sung announced that work on a constitution was near completion. This document provided for a national government with its capital at Seoul. He explained that there would be nationwide elections the following month, while displaying a new national flag sporting a hammer and sickle. On August 25, the people's Committee sponsored elections throughout Korea for delegates to a "Supreme Korean People's Assembly." During the first week in September, this body met in Pyongyang and promulgated the constitution. The legislature also elected a "Supreme People's Council" and chose Kim Tu-bong as chairman. Kim Tu-bong then selected Kim Il-sung as premier and called upon him to form a cabinet, thereby providing the ruling authority for the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" (DPRK). This new government announced that it represented the entire nation and would send delegates to the U.N.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, Korea had two governments by the end of 1948 and each one was dedicated to achieving reunification of the peninsula regardless of cost. From this point forward, the outbreak of a civil war only a matter of time.

---

103) Jacobs to Marshall July 11, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, VI, 1238-1239; *New York Times*, July 12, 1948, p.10, September 1, 1948, p.7, September 11, 1948, p.4; September of State, *Korea 1945 to 1948: A Report on Political Development and Economic Resources with selected Documents*, Far Eastern Series #28 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1948), 21; Jungwon A. Kim *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 107-108, 166-168.

Nevertheless, international developments would continue to have a significant impact on Korean affairs. Perhaps most important was the Truman administration's application of the containment strategy in Korea in an effort to destabilize the Communist regime in the north. It is conceivable that the DPRK decided to invade South Korea because it feared that a U. S. policy of rollback eventually would succeed. First, elections in South Korea during May 1950 had resulted in the defeat of politicians most closely linked to Rhee, suggesting progress toward the realization of a viable, if not democratic, political system. Second, economic conditions in South Korea recently had manifested a marked improvement, while the Rhee government had implemented strong measure to resolve its serious financial problems. Finally, the U. S. had decided to increase military assistance to the ROK. While the DPRK's leaders now had greater reason to fear invasion from the south, they also saw containment as a domestic political threat. North Korea had to destroy its rival or risk an internal aimed at ending Communist rule and achieving amalgamation with the south.

It now has been four desades North Korea launched its invasion of South Korea. The Korean conflict unquestionable had important domestic origins, but it was not a classic civil war. Nations experience internal warfare when their political or military leaders see force as the only way to resolve fundamental disagreements over the establishment of political, economic, and social goals. These circumstances, for example, explain the outbreak of the American Civil War. In Korea, this also may have been true of the internal situation in June 1950, but conditions necessary for civil war evidently did not exist in the immediate aftermath of japan's surrender in World War II. Most writers agree that in August 1945, the Korean people overwhelmingly supported the indigenious Korean People's Republic because it advocated a radical reform program and relied for legitmacy on a network of local people's Committees. But Japan's conquest of Korea in 1905 meant that the korean people would not be albe to determine their own

destiny. Leaders in Washington and Moscow, rather than in Seoul and Pyongyang, would make the key decisions transforming Korea's future from political unity and revolutionary change to partition and a bloody war for reunification. From 1945 to 1948, there were a number of opportunities to break this sequence of events, but the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union always eliminated the alternatives. The Korean conflict may have had domestic origins, but it was a civil war of a very peculiar sort.