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The Casualties of U.S. Grand Strategy:  
Korean Exclusion from the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Pacific Pact

By Syrus Jin

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for Honors in History  
In the College of Arts and Sciences  
Washington University in St. Louis

Advisor: Elizabeth Borgwardt

1 April 2019

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*Dedicated to the members of my family: Dad, Mom, Nika, Sean, and Pebble.*

## Abstract

From August 1945 to September 1951, the United States had a unique opportunity to define and frame how it would approach its foreign relations in the Asia-Pacific region. As the dominant power in the Pacific after World War II and claiming direct authority over vanquished Japan, the United States had the liberty to design its own post-war vision for the entire region. Until 1951, American State Department diplomats and government planners, attempted—ultimately unsuccessfully—to harmonize the competing motivations of lingering World War II multilateralist idealism and Cold War geopolitics in a postcolonial, postwar world. This thesis examines U.S.-Korean relations in context of how both sides grappled with the requirements of addressing a history of colonialism and wartime sacrifice, which came to be overshadowed by American Cold War-inflected concerns. U.S. policymakers ultimately shelved multilateralist defense schemes such as the Pacific Pact, which would have been a NATO in Asia. Through a series of short-term tactical decisions, U.S. diplomats also transformed the San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan from a post-war agreement of reconciliation and moral redress into a Cold War device that would reinstate Japanese strategic advantages, albeit under American control. Emblematic of this shift was the exclusion of Korea from both the peace treaty itself and its complementary defense negotiations. State Department officials avoided the responsibility of resolving persisting wartime issues even while attempting to implement a new postwar vision for Asia. U.S. diplomats had long-standing racialized assumptions about Korean cultural and political inferiority which corresponded with Americans' growing distaste for rehashing the legacy of Japanese imperialism in Asia. The stark reality was that Cold War geopolitics had left little room for long-term multilateralist visions for the future. By failing to address Korean concerns in the San Francisco Peace Treaty and its complementary defense structure, the U.S. in turn generated a postwar design for the Asia-Pacific guided solely by efforts to maximize American tactical advantages in both diplomatic and military contexts, to its long-term detriment.

## Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without funding from the Office of Undergraduate Research at Washington University in St. Louis, which funded my travels to the Truman Library Archives, the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University, and the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. During my travels I am thankful to the various staff members who helped me along the way, including, but not limited to, Randy Sowell and Jim Armistead at the Truman Archives, and Bilqees Sayed and Daniel Linke at Mudd Library.

There are many people and groups who assisted me in a variety of ways with writing this thesis. Min Choi gave suggestions for transcribing Korean names and happily took time out of his day to send information on aspects of Korean history. Sean Jin introduced me to Hemmer and Katzenstein's 2002 article and was happy to read through early drafts. Kyra Hamerling-Potts ensured that I would have a space in my life free from the clutches of writing this thesis. Dr. Mark Philip Bradley at the University of Chicago helped tackle questions of causality that I did not even know how to verbalize.

Most of all, I am grateful to the faculty and staff members at Washington University. They have certainly helped move this project forward in a variety of ways, but, more importantly, also fostered a spirit of intellectual discovery that has benefited me personally and academically. Dr. Margaret Garb was one of those individuals who brought so much to the department and to this cohort of Senior Thesis writers. Dr. Mark Pegg and Dr. Luca Foti both delivered terrific feedback and challenged me to improve. My second reader, Dr. Lori Watt, never faltered from treating me as an equal. Beyond her perspectives on Asian colonialism and Japanese history, her sharp insights and critiques were a crucial factor in my own intellectual growth and this project's completion. Finally, Dr. Elizabeth Borgwardt has served as a fantastic mentor for me throughout this project. From suggestions, to line edits, to her uplifting sense of humor, to her advice regarding this project and beyond, I am grateful for all that she has done on my behalf.

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## Abbreviations

DPRK – *Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)*

FRUS – *Foreign Relations of the United States, the State Department-published historical documents.*

KPG – *Korean Provisional Government*

JCS – *Joint Chiefs of Staff*

JFD – *John Foster Dulles*

NACP – *National Archives at College Park, Maryland*

NATO – *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*

NSC – *National Security Council*

ONAA – *Office of Northeast Asian Affairs*

PRC – *People’s Republic of China*

RG – *Record Group*

ROC – *Republic of China*

ROK – *Republic of Korea (South Korea)*

SCAP – *Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers*

SWNCC – *State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee*

USAMGIK – *U.S. Army Military Government in Korea*

## A Note on Names

The names of individuals from traditionally Confucian, Asian countries are listed in the way that they were most commonly referred to in U.S. diplomatic documents at the time, in order to facilitate future scholars who may be searching through archival documents. (e.g. Syngman Rhee’s surname was Rhee). Consequently, most names appear with the first name preceding the surname. There are rare exceptions for when documents regularly listed names with the surname preceding the first name. (e.g. Yoshida Shigeru’s surname was Yoshida).



*“And yet it seems to me the line between a just peace and an unjust war is very faint indeed.”*

*“No matter how repulsive the peace, it is still vital to guard it. It may be an immoral peace, maybe an unjust peace, but I’d take an unjust peace over a just war any day.”*

-A dialogue between Arakawa and Goto, from *Patlabor 2: The Movie*.

## Introduction

John Foster Dulles was a devout Christian, a skilled lawyer, and a fan of old rye whiskey. Alcohol consumption was sprinkled throughout Dulles' drafting sessions, meetings with his staff, and even negotiations with foreign governments. In February 1951, Dulles notably took offense when, in the middle of a break between negotiating sessions with the Australian government, his Australian host only offered him orange soda.<sup>1</sup> Yet those who knew Dulles were split on their opinions of him. Two different State Department bureaucrats, each of whom worked with Dulles in different capacities, posthumously assessed the austere cabinet member as “standoffish, cold, and insular-minded” and “warm, personable, and adaptable,” respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Dulles, or Foster Dulles as his friends called him, experienced firsthand the evolution of U.S. foreign relations as his country publicly shifted away from an isolationist mantra towards global commitment. His political career intersected and strongly influenced this arc in American foreign policy. As a young lawyer he had served as a staffer for the American delegation to the 1919 Paris Peace conference. With his own forays into domestic politics he gained experience attempting to sell a foreign policy platform to a skeptical public. In the span of four years from 1948 to 1952, Dulles advised the U.S. delegation to the UN, served as special advisor to the State Department, oversaw the negotiation of the peace treaty with Japan, and became Secretary of State under the Eisenhower administration. In a retroactive examination, Dulles was a foremost

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<sup>1</sup> Spender, Sir Percy (1897-1985) - Australian Ambassador to the United States, John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, MC017, Public Policy Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup> Butterworth, W. Walton (1903-1975), 1965, JFD Oral History Collection; Allison, John M. (1905-1978), 1969, JFD Oral History Collection.

witness and a key shaper of the transformation of Wilsonian internationalism, to Rooseveltian multilateralism, to Cold War realism.

Dulles did not keep a diary. His various publications may act as clues to aspects of his worldview, but it is difficult to parse what was surface and what was inner reality. To uncritically accept all descriptions of who he was would be to deal with mind-bending contradictions: a Presbyterian Christian with little patience for human rights concerns, a vociferous anti-Communist who stood by a think tank accused of having Communist ties, a diplomat motivated to improve upon the mistakes of President Wilson in 1919 but heedless of the loss of Wilsonian spirit with his own treaty negotiations.<sup>3</sup> Dulles' centrality to the story of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty seemingly plants an enigmatic figure in the way of our scholarship of American foreign policy in this period. The necessity of a certain amount of speculation about Dulles' worldview complicates what we may conclude about the influence of this one individual on the broader set of political or diplomatic results. It is necessary then, to move away from this one individual as we investigate the events with which he intertwined.

Individuals, especially government officials, are vital agents in diplomatic history. Yet it is a persistent assumption that they were solely rational actors, insulated from cross-contamination of broader social and cultural ideas. Often, a preexisting cultural assumption served to justify, and was justified by, the policy prescriptions that emerged from a rational,

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Dulles' religious influences, see Toulouse, Mark G. *The Transformation of John Foster Dulles*. (Mercer University Press: 1985), esp. 3-26 and Immerman, Richard H. *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy*. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Prussen details Dulles' activities in the Paris Peace conference. Pruessen, Ronald W. *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1982); The think tank in question was the Institute of Pacific Relations, the editor of which Dulles communicated with on multiple occasions. Letter from Dulles to Alfred Kohlberg, 7 Dec 1950, Box 48, John Foster Dulles: Selected Correspondence 1891-1960, RSBC, Princeton Library.

ostensibly clinical calculation of power. In other words, it is not just the actors—the analysts and the visiting ambassadors and the generals in their windowless planning rooms—who generated a historical outcome. The environment in which they worked, lived, and exhaled *into*, inevitably shaped the world around them and the world that they envisioned for the future.

What follows is not a biographical study of John Foster Dulles. It is, rather, a study of the world of decision-making that Dulles inhabited during his years of activity in the Truman administration. In doing so, it directly reflects on the *why* of certain decisions leading to the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan, and how this affected newly-independent states like the Republic of Korea (ROK). The United States may have possessed what Melvyn Leffler described as a “preponderance of power” in the world after WWII,<sup>4</sup> but American grand strategy was inadequate to cope with lingering questions of reconciliation and redress in the Asia-Pacific. In particular, the exclusion of the ROK from the San Francisco Peace Treaty and American defense plans have propelled this study. How American diplomats grappled with Korean issues exposed the striking transformation of the peace treaty from a postcolonial, postwar document into a Cold War device. The global priorities of the State Department had little room for lingering Korean concerns, which American diplomats labeled as obstructionist, unnecessary, and unimportant. The advent of the Cold War may have ushered in a new era of superpower rivalry, but it also permitted the United States to prematurely terminate any responsibility of moderating a conversation on Japan’s imperialist history. The legacy of that imperialism has persisted and continues to limit the extent of international cooperation that can be achieved in East Asia.

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<sup>4</sup> Leffler, Melvyn. *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*. (Stanford University Press, 1993).

There was more to the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty than meets the eye. It of course restored Japanese sovereignty and put a formal termination to World War II in Asia. But the treaty regime also signaled the beginning of American structural dominance in the Asia-Pacific. This was symbolized by the way American diplomats handled treaty issues and actualized by the bilateral security agreements that the U.S. concluded alongside the peace treaty. While the peace treaty was the outward face of freshly-minted American grand strategy, it nevertheless emphatically failed to live up to its advertised purposes. The exclusion of the ROK from the peace treaty process along with the story behind the aborted attempt to create a NATO in Asia, under the title of a “Pacific Pact,” are the two central issues that motivate and guide this investigation. Both affairs were the result of a dramatic shift in American foreign policy from encouraging multilateral cooperation and regional integration to the need for short-term tactical flexibility, even at the cost of resolving residual wartime disputes.

The exclusion of Korea highlights how American diplomats failed to reconcile the competing threads of addressing Japan’s wartime past and colonial legacies in Korea with America’s strategic priorities. The narrative of the Pacific Pact explores how State Department officials generally viewed Asia as a frontier fraught with uncertainty, and how they shied away from attempting to create a capacious framework for Asian security—the lack of structure, and constraints, on American policy would go on to become the defining feature of future American grand strategy in Asia. In a post-Cold War era, this foundation that originated in 1951 would in turn become an obstruction as American policymakers sought ways to bind South Korea and Japan closer together, only to encounter simmering feuds between the two nations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lee, Chung Min. *Prospects for US-South Korean-Japanese Trilateral Security Cooperation in an Era of Unprecedented Threats and Evolving Political Forces*. The Atlantic Council, Dec 2018; “U.S. Lawmakers Tout U.S.-Japan-South Korea Alliance as Seoul, Tokyo Feud.” *Reuters*. 12 Feb 2019.

This research builds on past scholarship regarding Korean exclusion and the Pacific Pact. South Korea did not officially sign the peace treaty with Japan, ostensibly because of American insistence that the ROK was not an allied power. Some analysts, like the historian Seong-hwa Cheong, argue that South Korea was not a signatory primarily due to American fear of Soviet objections and British dislike for Korean President Syngman Rhee. In contrast, social and cultural historians like John Price argue that American and Japanese racism and Dulles' dim view of Korean capacities led to the ROK's exclusion.<sup>6</sup> While the first view ignores the predominant role that the U.S. played as essentially the sole gatekeeper to the peace treaty, the second credits Dulles with too much power. At the time of the treaty negotiations, Dulles was not Secretary of State but instead a special ambassador, appointed by then-President Truman and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, to execute the treaty negotiations. Dulles had authority over treaty negotiation, but that authority stemmed from the approval of the State Department and the vast array of earlier plans that diplomats at the State Department bequeathed to Dulles.

This study takes a different approach. It focuses on analyzing how the evolution of American perception of Korean issues reflected the competing strains of thought within the American government, from genuine interest in multilateralism to security-oriented *realpolitik*. Longstanding cultural attitudes and ignorance set the stage for continuing American disinterest in Korean attempts to achieve moral redress for Korea's colonial past. Korean exclusion was sealed by departmental concerns about upsetting a careful timeline that prioritized the restoration of

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<sup>6</sup> Cheong, Sung-hwa. *The Politics of Anti-Japanese Sentiment in Korea: Japanese-South Korean Relations under American Occupation, 1945-1952*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Price, John. *'Orienting' Canada: Race, Empire and the Transpacific* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011).

Japanese sovereignty. The need for a Cold War grand strategy decisively eliminated the possibility for a conversation on colonial and wartime questions.

Similarly, historians and international relations scholars have examined the Pacific Pact and the broader reasons for why there is no NATO-like alliance in Asia. Realist theories have argued that the U.S. intended to maximize its advantage over its varying Asian partners. Victor Cha has exemplified this approach, under his “powerplay” theory. David Mahon, instead, argues that the United States acquiesced to the objections of its other partners in the Asia-Pacific, who could not abide by a multilateral alliance that would also include a “rehabilitated” Japan. Constructivist scholars like Peter Katzenstein and Christopher Hemmer have instead emphasized the lack of cultural affinity stretching across the Pacific and garden-variety racism among white Americans for the lack of interest in a robust collective defense organization in Asia.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis builds on this work by arguing that the State Department viewed multilateralism, and a would-be Pacific Pact, as a means to an end. A rapidly changing geopolitical landscape compounded by the respective frangibility of potential partners incentivized American planners and diplomats to respond to and develop proposals on short notice, often choosing the path of least resistance. Within the State Department, the pact was solely a satisficing tool to ensure the passage of a peace treaty. The stunted nature of the pact proposal resulted in a short shelf life, as Americans turned away from the difficulty of addressing internal Asian concerns which would have been necessary via a multilateral alliance. For

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<sup>7</sup> Cha, Victor. “The Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia.” *International Security*, Vol 34, no. 3, (Winter 2009/2010): 158-196; Mahon, David. “Elusive Agreements: The Pacific Pact Proposals of 1949-1951.” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 57, no.2, (May 1988): 147-177; Hemmer, Christopher and Peter J. Katzenstein. “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism.” *International Organizations*, Vol. 56, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 575-607.

American policymakers, Asia was an uncertain, unstable frontier. Rather than expend energy normalizing relations between Asian nations and Japan, the United States relied on bilateral alliances to secure its immediate security goals.

Although after World War II the United States had seemingly unlimited leverage over its partners in the Asia-Pacific region, American diplomats and policymakers failed to resolve the lingering issues that could reconcile Japan with its neighbors or integrate Korea into a vision for Asia. Observers at the time also noticed this failing; Marshall Green, an analyst in the office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the State Department, opined in a memorandum dated from late October 1949 that there “would seem to be cause for encouraging ties between our two proteges in Northeast Asia, and cause for doing it now while we retain pretty much of a controlling hand in the affairs of these two countries.”<sup>8</sup> This thesis seeks to answer the same questions to which Green never received a clear response.

The negotiation of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the attempt at a multilateral Pacific Pact were two central processes in the American construction of a geopolitical structure in Asia. Cold War concerns shaped the broad contours of American grand strategy, but American diplomats still had to confront keen Korean interests in the outcomes of the treaty and the pact. Despite the spark of multilateralist fervor in the ending days of World War II, American diplomats ultimately failed to normalize relations between Japan and Korea. In the end, American diplomats found no way to weave moral reconciliation into the need to secure American interests in the context of a crystallizing Cold War. The long-standing racialized assumptions of Korean cultural and political inferiority by American diplomats corresponded

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<sup>8</sup> Original document used underline and is replicated here. “Office Memorandum from Green to Allison.” 29 October 1949, Box 4037, Folder 794.95/1-145 – 12-3149, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59.



with their growing distaste for discussing the legacy of Japanese imperialism in Asia. This exposed the stark reality that Cold War geopolitics left little room for a multilateralist vision for the future. By failing to address Korean concerns in the San Francisco Peace Treaty and its complementary defense structure, the U.S. in turn generated a postwar design for the Asia-Pacific guided solely by efforts to maximize American tactical advantages in both diplomatic and military contexts.

In pursuit of this argument, the thesis is organized into three chapters. Chapter 1 offers historical context for American ignorance regarding Korea. It then relates that while American planning slowly germinated and eventually led to the flurry of activity centered around the peace treaty, Korean issues festered amidst a poorly-managed American occupation of Korea. Chapter 2 focuses on the issue of Korean exclusion from the peace treaty, demonstrating how American diplomats responded to, analyzed, and addressed (i.e. failed to address) futile Korean efforts to gain signatory status. The results of the negotiation of the peace treaty led to the creation of the “San Francisco System” of alliances in Asia. Chapter 3 specifically investigates the evolution of American security designs, analyzing why Korea never featured in American collective security plans, and the eventual American decision to only pursue the establishment of bilateral alliances in Asia.

By September 1951, the United States had assembled the bones for its foreign policy for the next several decades. American bilateral alliances with Asian countries have lasted to the present day, along with the absence of multilateral alliances that might facilitate intra-Asian cooperation. Issues that originated from Japan’s imperialist history have continued to plague the possibility of greater reconciliation across the Sea of Japan. This study takes a new approach by not labeling any one individual as the sole culprit nor by assuming that Machiavellian

calculations motivated the entirety of American decisions. Instead, it examines the institution of the State Department across time and how its institutional history of addressing Korean issues inevitably led to the decision to exclude ROK from the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the abortive-Pacific Pact. Due to how and why those decisions unfolded in the postwar period, U.S.-Asian and intra-Asian relations have remained shackled by the undiscussed casualties of the past.

## Chapter 1

### Searching between the Margins: U.S. Postwar and Occupation Policy

The December 5, 1943 Sunday edition of the *The Boston Globe* presents a snapshot of news reporting amid an unfolding global conflict. The headline news, an update on the rolling American offensive powering towards Rome, dominates much of the front page, as do other reports of Allied air offensives, bloody fighting on the Pacific island of Tarawa, and the combat death of a former boxing champion-turned enlisted soldier.<sup>9</sup> Nestled beneath the photo of Madame Chiang Kai-shek wearing a fashionable hat while visiting Egypt is a blurb of an article that discusses the issue of Korean independence after a prospective Japanese defeat.

The article was ostensibly intended to explain the context of the December 1, 1943 Cairo Declaration between President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), where the three leaders agreed to share the responsibility of preparing Korea for political independence. But much of the article serves to acquaint the reader with what and where Korea is. “It is larger than England, Scotland, and Wales combined, and has a population as big as Spain’s...” Much of the article reads like a concise encyclopedic entry, with a brief background section that characterizes the erstwhile peninsular kingdom as isolated and never having modernized prior to annexation by Japan. It ends by labeling Koreans as unwilling subjects of Japan and, thus, not an enemy people. The

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<sup>9</sup> Hartman, Carl. “Giving Korea Her Independence May Be a Ticklish Job.” *Daily Boston Globe*, 5 December 1943.

article characterizes Korea as a passive agent, subject to the whims of Japanese control and Allied post-war plans, respectively.

The author of the article, Carl Hartman, was a D.C.-based journalist focused on Capitol Hill and was no one's idea of a Korea expert.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis on historical context in pursuit of understanding the Cairo Declaration is reflective of the average reader's unfamiliarity with Korea at the time, but also, perhaps, Hartman's own necessary background research while reporting on the December 1 agreement. For the American public, for news reporters, and even American postwar planners, Korea required an introduction.

The content of *The Globe's* Korea article is reflective of Korea's submerged position in the American public view prior to 1945. Only Japanese colonial control of Korea afforded the former "hermit kingdom," as Hartman labeled it, what attention in mainstream newspapers it did receive in the 1940s. The absence of a unified Korean government-in-exile that could convincingly trace itself back to the old ruling monarchy in Korea did not help the cause of independence. Although specialized non-governmental organizations and isolated American individuals may have kept themselves abreast of the cause of Korean subjugation, the memories of Korean independence had grown dimmer in the decades since the time of Japan's annexation and the start of World War II. There is an enormous transition from late 1943, when readers of *The Globe* might have read about Korea in depth for the first time, to 1950, when thousands of American soldiers fought to preserve the South Korean state against its northern counterpart.

Korea was not merely an unknown entity to the average American reader; specifics were lost even on the supposed American experts who struggled to find a place for Korea within their postwar designs. American rhetoric during the war may have claimed to support Korea in a post-

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<sup>10</sup> Hartman also wrote for *The Jewish Advocate* where he authored a column called "Capitol Spotlight", which was a weekly roundup of Capitol Hill news during the war.

colonial transition, as evidenced by the Cairo Declaration, but it masked the utter absence of detailed plans. As the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan in August 1945, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC, pronounced “swink”) attempted to partition Korea into Soviet and American occupation zones, largely to prevent Soviet expansion in Northeast Asia. After a late-night drafting session on August 10 and consulting a crude map of Korea, SWNCC hastily chose the thirty-eighth parallel as the partition line. The Soviet Union promptly accepted the demarcation, with both countries having the vague understanding that elections would materialize later and unify the peninsula.<sup>11</sup> This ad hoc decision formed the basis for the militarized border between North and South Korea, and closely resembled the eventual border that settled between the two nations in 1953.

From 1945 to 1948, the American army officers who found themselves administering southern Korea muddled their way through with marginal successes. Eventually, the U.S. Army ended its occupation of Korea, leaving the fragile Syngman Rhee government with a handful of Army advisors and promises of economic aid. The American withdrawal from Korea was not made in the interests of geopolitics or grand strategy, but rather for the less elegant reason to save money, men, and resources from a low priority in a time of defense sequesters and a limited budget.

In the immediate postwar era, American decision-making marginalized Korean issues. The long years where there was no unified Korean voice in the international scene from 1905 to 1945 resulted in the general American assumption that Korea was neither strategically or symbolically important. Unlike other Japanese wartime territorial acquisitions, the former colony was unique in that the sheer length of time since its independence had obliterated the possibility

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<sup>11</sup> For a retelling of the drafting session, see Schaller, Michael. *The American Occupation of Japan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 74-75.

of American liberators “returning” Korea to its rightful leadership—there was no universally-accepted government-in-exile to whose leadership Korea could be returned. Korea, instead, blended into the background as being one of many newly-independent, “politically inexperienced” states. At a time when Korea’s fate depended on American decision-making, the country remained on the fringes of American interest and concerns. Until the start of the Korean War, the only avenue through which the ROK could advocate for itself would be in context of the negotiation of the peace treaty.

### I. “Is it Spelt with a C or a K?”

On November 17, 1905, Korea officially became a Japanese protectorate. The Joseon dynasty, Korea’s ruling dynastic kingdom since the fourteenth century and traditionally a tribute state of China, became one of the first victims of Japan’s new imperialist objectives. Japan asserted both its Great Power ambitions and its status as the most powerful state in East Asia as it grabbed colonies of its own. Japanese control of Korea was received well among some American observers. *The New York Times*, reporting on November 19, ends its dry relaying of events by stating: “...it is believed that the Korean people will be much better governed in the future [under Japanese rule].”<sup>12</sup> The November 18 edition of the *Los Angeles Times* even more strongly reflected the pervasiveness of the belief that Korea was an un-modernized, barbaric nation. “KOREA BALKS AT HER MEDICINE,” the headline blares. “Dose of civilization from Dr.

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<sup>12</sup> “Korean Cabinet Gives In, Accepts Japanese Protectorate After Nine Hours’ Discussion.” *The New York Times*, 19 Nov 1905.

Japan tastes bad.”<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the protestations of the Korean Emperor, haplessly marooned under Japanese house arrest in Seoul, at the loss of his nation’s sovereignty had little weight among the editors.

Japan annexed Korea outright in 1910. In a time of new imperialism, where the belief that Western nations still needed to reluctantly bear the burden of uplifting the uncivilized corners of the world, most observers generally considered Japan’s annexation in a positive light. Western writers viewed Korea as an anachronism, a remnant of medieval times, but now in the orbit of modernizing, progressive Japanese influence. The eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, published in 1911, describes the annexation in the following way: “That [the annexation] constituted a heavy blow to Korea’s independence could not be gainsaid. That it was inevitable seemed to be equally obvious. For there existed in Korea nearly all the worst abuses of medieval systems...” The entry then proceeds to list the barbaric nature of Korean law, military, government, and society as a justification for the nation’s newfound colonial status.<sup>14</sup>

Missionaries often had divided opinions in this era, with some supporting Japan’s moves to reduce the prevalence of Buddhism in Korea, thus opening space for Christian conversion efforts.<sup>15</sup> But others sought to bring the issue of Korean independence to light. Hulbert B. Homer, a Methodist missionary from Vermont, published several books decrying Japanese aggression. “The American public has been persistently told that the Korean people are a

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<sup>13</sup> "KOREA BALKS AT HER MEDICINE, Dose of Civilization from Dr. Japan Tastes Bad." *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Nov 1905.

<sup>14</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. “Japan – Foreign Intercourse.” Cambridge: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911.

<sup>15</sup> Griffith, William Elliot. *Corea: The Hermit Nation*, 9th ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 519. Originally published in 1897.

degenerate...nation, incapable of better things, intellectually inferior, and better off under Japanese rule than independent. The following pages may in some measure answer these charges...”<sup>16</sup> Homer writes in *The Passing of Korea* (originally published in 1906). Later in the book, Homer censures the discriminatory legal code in Korea. “Japanese look upon the Koreans as lawful game, and the latter, *having no proper tribunals where they can obtain redress*, do not dare to retaliate.”<sup>17</sup> Hulbert was a unique figure, motivated by a mixture of Wilsonian idealism and down-to-earth empathy for the suffering of his fellow man. In the 1950s, the ROK’s attempts to confront Japan would also be obstructed by the lack of proper tribunals on an international scale.

However, Korea remained an issue that few talked about. In common with many other representatives from colonial states, a Korean delegation made its way to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference but spurred little progress.<sup>18</sup> For the next three decades, Korea remained hidden from Western view, only emerging in news reports of Japanese counterinsurgency operations in Korea, travel guides, and the occasional call for independence by Korean exiles or a lone Western sympathizer. One author of a 1930 travel guide, H. B. Drake, lamented Western ignorance of Korea. ““Is it spelt with a C or a K?”” Drake recounts a question he was asked before he set off on his travels. But despite his exultations of Korea’s natural beauties and rich history, Drake himself repeats the oft-quoted line that Korea’s colonial status is for the best, and

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<sup>16</sup> Hulbert, Homer B. *The Passing of Korea*. (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969), 9. Originally published 1906.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>18</sup> For a retelling of the efforts of colonial states to obtain representation during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, please see Manela, Erez. *The Wilsonian Moment*. (Oxford University Press, 2009).



that Japan “was conscience-bound to extend to her the benefits of modern progress.” His depiction of the Korean university students whom he mentored during his travels negotiate the blurred line between adoring and patronizing, labeling them as unhappy with Japan’s authority but helpless, mindless, and unintelligent enough to think of an alternative.<sup>19</sup>

Japanese administration of Korea, like many other colonial states, was geared towards maximizing the flow of assets from the “periphery” (Korea) to the “core” (Japan). Japanese administrators harnessed Korea’s manpower and natural resources to fuel the empire’s industrial growth. Bruce Cumings describes Japan’s colonial policy in Korea as “a means of...providing the wherewithal to mobilize and extract resources on an unprecedented scale.”<sup>20</sup> Extraction is an apt term. In order for Japan to “colonize” a formerly-sovereign nation, Korean culture and language had to be eliminated. Japanese officials exploited existing class divides that originated from Korea’s previously Confucian, agricultural society in pursuit of maintaining order. Many aspiring Koreans faced the unsavory choice of collaborating with the Japanese occupier or having no opportunities for social or economic advancement. Japan’s totalitarian control of Korea did spark resistance, both violent and nonviolent, which in turn prompted an even greater increase in the numbers of colonial police and soldiers who sought to root out opposition to Japanese rule. Nevertheless, within an Asian racial hierarchy, American writers during Korea’s colonial period consciously placed Korea beneath Japan. Americans were impressed by Japanese modernization, innovation, and military prowess, and had few qualms about Japan’s

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<sup>19</sup> Drake, H.B. *Korea of the Japanese*. (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Ltd., 1936), 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 10-12.

administration of Korea. So long as Japanese control was framed by both Japanese and American observers as uplifting for Koreans, Japanese control had few detractors abroad.

*a. A War to Spark American Interest*

Korea's relationship with the United States changed dramatically as American relations with Japan soured. When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, Korea gained some renewed prominence; American condemnation of Japanese aggression in turned transformed Korea into a subjugated land in need of liberation from the Japanese imperialist yoke. Materially, the U.S. was now generating postwar plans for what would happen to Japanese holdings after a surrender. Korea was now a region for which the U.S. had to incorporate into its plans by necessity. Beginning in 1943, the Allied Powers agreed on early plans for Korea to undergo a period of trusteeship—multilateralist “guidance” that would prepare Koreans for independence—and culminated in the December 1, 1943 declaration by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek to support Korean independence “in due course.” Although the trusteeship scheme in retrospect appears belittling, it was nevertheless motivated in the United States by concepts that American/Allied tutelage would be benevolent, nobly-minded—and crucially—distinct from past Japanese or Western imperialism.

The lack of contact or consultation between postwar planners and actual Koreans severely limited the extent of to which American benevolence could translate to effective policy. During the war, the State Department took care to avoid contact with advocacy efforts by Korean exile groups and rejected calls for the U.S. to recognize any one as a government-in-exile. The Korean Provisional Government (KPG), which the ROK lists as its institutional predecessor, was

the most internationally-prominent quasi-government-in-exile.<sup>21</sup> Founded by independence activists, the KPG, based in Shanghai, organized assassinations, bombings, and full-on engagements with Japanese military units. During the war, the KPG organized a small military detachment, fewer than a thousand soldiers, who served alongside the Kuomintang army in China. But many of the KPG's most audacious operations occurred in the early period of Japanese occupation and had questionable impact beyond establishing an institutional history of resistance. The KPG was severely limited in terms of its resources which constricted its ability to "prove" to the State Department that it should receive recognition.

Even as American rhetoric incorporated the call for Korean independence during the war, the State Department was loath to give recognition to the KPG. It saw the group as merely an uncredentialed club that survived solely on Chiang Kai-shek's. On June 5, 1945, the State Department replied to a request by Syngman Rhee, then the KPG's "ambassador" to the U.S., for Korea to be represented as an Allied Power at the 1945 San Francisco Conference. Although previous department replies to KPG lobbying had been noncommittal, expressing support for the cause of liberation while avoiding comments on the KPG's claim to sovereignty, this letter held no such diplomatic reservations:

The United Nations which are represented at the San Francisco Conference all have legally constituted governing authorities, whereas the "Korean Provisional Government" and other Korean organizations do not possess the qualifications requisite for obtaining recognition by the United States as a governing authority. The "Korean Provisional Government" has never had administrative authority

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce Cumings details the efforts of other Korean resistance groups, most notably Kim Il Sung, future leader of the DPRK, who was a fighter in the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army (NAJUA) guerrilla group in Manchuria. The modest successes of the NAJUA led to its virtual extinction by a Japanese counterinsurgency campaign before 1941. Kim Il Sung retreated to the Soviet Union and worked closely with Chinese and Soviet communists, rather than Western-supported governments during World War II. Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War Vol. I*, 31-39.

over any part of Korea nor can it be considered representative of the Korean people of today. Its following even among exile Koreans is limited.<sup>22</sup>

No doubt the State Department could compare the characteristics of the KPG to other governments-in-exile. The Norwegian government-in-exile included Norway's ruling family which was evacuated during the German invasion. The Free French forces were set up by Charles De Gaulle, a general in the French Army and a government minister. The KPG, instead, was composed of independence activists and Korean nationalists, none of whom had pre-annexation government credentials or royal blood. Of course, the State Department would have been hard-pressed to find any Korean exile group that previously "had administrative authority over any part of Korea," given that Japanese colonial control was nearing its forty-year anniversary. But the lack of other options did not confer international recognition to the KPG. It remained on the fringes, unable to gain entry or an audience with the Allied policy-makers who conferred about Korea's future.

Although the State Department's concerns about the legitimacy of Korean exile groups is understandable given that no group had a pedigree that traced back to the dynastic governing authority of Korea, in blocking off contact between itself and exile groups the department also removed possibilities for consultation with Korean individuals. Deflecting the interests of Korean exiles, no matter American suspicions, ensured that American postwar planning approached Korea without regard to the specific history or makeup of Korea's domestic interests. As Korea edged closer towards independence, in step with the march of American marines island-hopping across the Pacific Ocean towards Japan, American ignorance persisted. As a result, Korea remained a blank canvas in the minds of many American policymakers: a colonized

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<sup>22</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter referred to as *FRUS*) 1945, Volume VI, Document 766.

people in need of independence and introduction to an American-led, free market global system, but with no distinguishing characteristics that demanded special attention. In the future, as American diplomats labored to build a comprehensive defensive/diplomatic architecture for American involvement in Asia, they would have to contend with the harsh truth that Koreans themselves thought of Korean issues with the utmost importance.

## II. The Road to 1950

With the collapse of Japan's empire, the United States took on the responsibility of occupying and administering the portion of Korea south of the thirty-eighth parallel. The insulated nature of American decision-making regarding Korea during the war also carried over into postwar decisions. Decisions relating to the U.S. Occupation of Japan had stemmed from years of preparation, planning, and discussion between the various bureaucratic agents in the U.S. Stemming from necessary wartime preoccupation with Japanese questions, issues like the status of the Japanese Emperor and the extent to which the Imperial Japanese government officials would be relied upon while administering the nation were subjected to a series of conversations that weighed the pros and cons over time. In the end, General MacArthur was appointed to lead the American occupation authority, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), that would work through the existing Japanese bureaucracy in administering the occupation, at the very least promoting an image of cooperation rather than overlordship.

In contrast, the War Department designated General John R. Hodge and his unit, the XXIV Corps, to occupy Korea on August 15, just one day after Japan's surrender. Hodge, characterized by one historian as a "combat officer with few political skills" had no preparation

for his newfound role as civil administrator, and the War Department settled on Hodge largely because the XXIV Corps was the closest Army unit that could be rapidly deployed to Korea in the event of a collapse of Japan's colonial structure.<sup>23</sup> Hodge arrived in Seoul at the head of a new authority for southern Korea, the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), with little understanding of the issues that he would soon have to face.

Much has been written about the often-short-sighted decisions made during USAMGIK's tenure in Korea. Hodge had little sympathy or patience for Korean issues, in part stemming from his belief in Korean ethnic and mental inferiority. One colorful telegram sent from General Hodge to MacArthur, a few months after the start of the American occupation, cited Hodge's frustration that he was forced to deal with "poorly trained, and poorly educated Orientals strongly affected by 40 years of Jap control, who stubbornly and fanatically hold on to what they like and dislike, ...and with whom it is almost impossible to reason."<sup>24</sup> USAMGIK continued to employ Japanese bureaucrats during the early period of the occupation, and promoted reactionary policies that undercut the legitimacy of the future ROK government that it sought to inaugurate. USAMGIK also supported Syngman Rhee, far from the most popular figure among southern Koreans, largely because occupation officials saw the English-speaking conservative as the best choice to prevent instability or, even worse, the election of a communist sympathizer.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cited characterization of General Hodge comes from Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 75; Matray, James I. "Hodge Podge: American Occupation Policy in Korea, 1945-1948." *Korean Studies* Vol. 19 (1995): 17-38.

<sup>24</sup> *FRUS 1946*, Vol VIII, Document 473.

<sup>25</sup> Buzo, Adrian. *Making of Modern Korea*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017); Cumings, *Origins of the Korea War Vol. 1*, esp. 135-209; Matray, 20-22; Hudson, Walter M. *Army Diplomacy: American Military Occupation and Foreign Policy After World War II*. (University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

With little support or assistance from other agencies in the Truman administration, the U.S. occupation was a confused process of attempting to maintain political and economic stability while searching for an acceptable figure to whom the responsibility of managing the nation could be thrust.

As the American occupation came to a close, American material support for the newly-minted ROK government dwindled. One of the few instances of American support for ROK issues on an international scale came in December 1948, when the ROK achieved UN recognition in the form of observer status with the help of John Foster Dulles, who was acting as an advisor to the American delegation to the UN at the time.<sup>26</sup> But American support in the UN did not translate to broader support for Rhee's government. The Department of the Army was eager to withdraw from Korea. The initial date for USAMGIK's withdrawal was September 15, 1948, which the Army reluctantly agreed to delay until March 1949 due to disagreements with the State Department about the ROK's stability.<sup>27</sup> Rhee's 50,000-man military was far from equal to the strength of the burgeoning North Korean army. But in 1948, the Truman administration only asked for \$10 billion in defense spending, which would require a 13 percent reduction in military personnel across the services.<sup>28</sup> The requirements of an American

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<sup>26</sup> The efforts of the ROK to obtain representation in the UN is recounted in the following interview with Dr. John Chang Myun, who was a Korean diplomat and later briefly served as Prime Minister during the 1960 democracy movement. Chang, Myun (1899-1966) – Prime Minister of Korea, 1964, JFD Oral History Collection, 1-6.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Kenneth Royall, Secretary of the Army, to Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, 23 Jun 1948, Box 1, Niles Bond Papers, Harry S. Truman Library Archives, Independence, Missouri; "Memorandum of Conversation between Butterworth and Secretary Acheson," 5 March 1948, Box 1, Folder "1-2: Document 1-9: Sept 1947 – July 1948", Niles Bond Papers, Truman Library.

<sup>28</sup> Leffler, 223.

occupation in Korea drained on Army resources at a time when there was a domestic pressure to balance the budget.

After the American withdrawal, Korea did feature in some nascent economic revival plans in the State Department but remained outside the clear boundaries that designated strong American interests. Newly-minted Secretary of State Dean Acheson, aware of Korea's historical role as Japan's chief source of rice and agricultural surpluses, had some interest in sending aid to Korea in order to indirectly support Japan's economic recovery.<sup>29</sup> However, the lack of congressional interest in another foreign aid bill, particularly to what seemed a corner of nowhere, sank Acheson's proposal. Korean issues returned to its pre-war position at the periphery of American attention.

In April 1950, less than two months prior to the start of the Korean War, only eleven Foreign Service Officers and a handful of support staffers served in the American embassy in Seoul. For a point of comparison, in 2011 over two hundred American Foreign Service Officers and four hundred other staff members were listed on payroll at the U.S. Embassy in South Korea.<sup>30</sup> The small contingent of American diplomats were heavily overworked, to the point that almost no employee in the embassy was allowed to take local leave due to the workload and staffing shortage.<sup>31</sup> The tiny size of the embassy demonstrates the low level of attention the State

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<sup>29</sup> McGlothlen, Ronald. *Controlling the Waves*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), esp. 56-86; Kim, Seung-young. *American Diplomacy and Strategy Towards Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882-1950 and After*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 170-192.

<sup>30</sup> United States Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Office of the Inspector General. *Inspection of the Embassy Seoul, Republic of Korea: Report Number ISP-I-11-55A*. August 2011. [www.stateoig.gov](http://www.stateoig.gov)

<sup>31</sup> The inspection report of the U.S. Embassy in the ROK was compiled from October 1949 to late March 1950. The report was mailed to Foggy Bottom on 11 May 1950, about five weeks before the start of the Korean War. Of interest is the report's condemnation of four



Department assigned towards events in Korea prior to the start of the Korean War, and Korea's minimal level of gravity as a State Department responsibility.

Yet the start of the Korean War as well as the commencement of concrete moves towards a peace treaty with Japan ensured that the ROK would surge to the forefront of American concerns. Materially, the State Department would begin paying much closer attention to telegrams sent from the U.S. Ambassador to Korea. Korea, once a "backwater" deployment, was the new focus of men, materiel, and diplomatic activity. Ironically, the ROK government's near-collapse in the early months of the war also gave it a more prominent position from which to advocate. Additionally, the concrete moves towards the conclusion of a peace treaty began nearly simultaneously with the start of the Korean War, adding urgency to American diplomatic efforts. With the peace treaty and the American need to generate a new grand strategy for the Asia-Pacific, dusty issues of Korea's place in America's postwar vision reemerged. The question of how to resolve the residual issues from the legacy of Japanese imperialism entered stage left. With it, came the spotlight that would also illuminate Korea's attempt to gain both moral redress and a place in America's postwar plans.

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Korean wives of American embassy staffers, which constituted a "psychological problem...for the [embassy]" due to their lack of English language skills and feuds with one another. "Foreign Service Inspection Report on the American Embassy at Seoul," 11 May 1950, Box 1, Folder "Pusan, 1950", Seoul Mission and Embassy Misc. Classified Records 1948-1955, Record Group 84, National Archives at College Park, College Park Maryland. (Hereafter referred to as RG #, NACP).

## Chapter 2

### Shutting the Lid to Pandora's Box: Korea's Status in the Peace Treaty

#### I. San Francisco's Muddled Legacy

On September 8, 1951, delegations from forty-eight nations gathered in the opulent San Francisco opera house and signed a peace treaty which would formally end the war between the victorious Allied Powers and Japan. Although the Soviet Union walked out in the middle of the conference, the treaty nevertheless formally signaled the restoration of Japanese sovereignty. “The Japan of today is no longer the Japan of yesterday,” Yoshida Shigeru, the Japanese Prime Minister, said before the assembled delegates. “We will not fail your expectations of us as a new nation, dedicated to peace, democracy and freedom.”<sup>32</sup> The peace treaty was a coup for the Truman administration, which had authorized John Foster Dulles to lead the U.S. treaty negotiating team in June 1950. The treaty reduced Japan's territories to its home islands and authorized the seizure of overseas Japanese assets, but—unlike the discredited 1919 Treaty of Versailles—largely refrained from punitive reparations and further restrictions on sovereignty.

In a nonbinding clause, Japan pledged to “refrain” from the “use of force” in international disputes going forward. Another article encouraged affected nations seeking reparations to

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<sup>32</sup> James Reston. “Yoshida Avers Country Will Not ‘Fail’ Allies in Promoting Points.” *New York Times*, 8 Sept 1951.

initiate their own negotiations with the Japanese government.<sup>33</sup> When a group of Japanese businessmen visited Nebraska in early 1952, they expressed amazement with their American host that San Francisco was not at all “the treaty of a conqueror.”<sup>34</sup> The U.S. would be capping off six years of a generally successful occupation of Japan, just in time for the United States to repeatedly petition its former wartime foe to rearm in the face of Soviet machinations in East Asia.

Yet for all the reasons why the treaty was initially praised for its leniency, the San Francisco peace is perforated by its controversial legacy. The enduring hostilities of the Cold War, embodied by the Soviet walkout, permeated the conference and its attendant news coverage. The September 8, 1951 issue of *The New York Times* noted uneasily that San Francisco may have “reconciled” Japan with the Western Allies, but it was “not quite a peace of reconciliation from the point of view of the great powers.”<sup>35</sup> Additionally, with a war still raging on the Korean peninsula—separated from Japan by a strait measuring only 120 miles wide—American military planners were anxious to ensure that the prosecution of the war would not be interrupted by the resumption of Japanese sovereignty. Consequently, a security treaty between Japan and the United States was signed on the same day as the peace treaty, granting the U.S. exclusive rights to maintain bases and military forces in Japan.<sup>36</sup> Japan’s sovereignty was

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<sup>33</sup> Article 5(a) and 14(a)1 of “Treaty of Peace with Japan,” signing date September 8, 1951, *United Nations Treaty Series*, registration no. 1832.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from E.N. Thompson to John M. Allison, 24 Jan 1952, Box 4, Folder “Correspondence 1952”, John M. Allison Papers, Truman Library.

<sup>35</sup> Reston. “Yoshida Avers.”

<sup>36</sup> “Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan,” signing date September 8, 1951.

returned with a bright red asterisk, asserting its subordination to American security interests in Asia.

The San Francisco Peace Treaty initiated a new political-economic order that not only defined relations between Japan and the United States, but also America's place in the Asia-Pacific. International relations scholar Kent Calder popularized the term "San Francisco System" to describe this new Pacific order; an order marked by American dominance of geopolitical matters and continuing unwillingness, or a recurring inability, among nations in the Asia-Pacific to reconcile with Japan over unaddressed aspects of Japanese wartime imperialism.<sup>37</sup> One such aspect of San Francisco's troubled legacy was the absence of the Republic of Korea (ROK) from the treaty conference, having been denied an invitation despite repeated attempts to seek signatory status. The San Francisco Peace Treaty was billed as both a backwards and forwards-facing instrument that could restore Japanese sovereignty and bookend World War II in the

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<sup>37</sup> Historiography on the San Francisco Peace Treaty has largely focused on the subsequent security system or enduring territorial disputes. Seokwoo Lee. "Territorial Disputes in East Asia, The San Francisco Peace Treaty Of 1951, and The Legacy of U.S. Security Interests In East Asia." In: S. Lee and H. Lee, ed., *Dokdo: Historical Appraisal and International Justice*. (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers), 41-70; Kimie Hara. "50 Years from San Francisco: Re-Examining the Peace Treaty and Japan's Territorial Problems." *Pacific Affairs* 74, no. 3 (2001): 361-82; Leszek Buszynski disputes that the San Francisco Treaty was intended to initiate a comprehensive security structure in Asia due to its Japan-centric focus. Although Buszynski questions U.S. intentions, the U.S. engineered the ANZUS, U.S.-Philippines, and U.S.-Japan alliances directly because of the treaty process. Japan was the center of a developing U.S. strategy, and subsequently spawned U.S. commitments elsewhere across the Pacific. Leszek Buszynski. "The San Francisco System: Contemporary Meaning and Challenges." *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 35, no. 3 (September 2011): 315-35; Kent Calder, "Securing Security Through Prosperity: the San Francisco System in Perspective," *Pacific Review*, Vol. 17, no. 1, (March 2004): 135-157; John Dower, "The San Francisco System: Past, Present, and Future in U.S.-Japan-China Relations," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 8, no. 2, (Feb 2014).

Pacific. Korean exclusion raises questions over how effectively the treaty could fulfill either of these goals and satisfy lingering wartime animosities.

The ROK was not an Allied Power, as it was not a UN-recognized state until 1948 and the KPG never received recognition during World War II. This lack of credentials was the oft-quoted reason for Korean exclusion by American diplomats at the time. In July 1951, Dulles, acting as a special representative of the State Department, informed the stunned Korean ambassador Yang You-Chan that the ROK would not be a treaty signatory. Dulles offered the reasoning that only those nations which were participants of the 1942 UN Declaration would sign a treaty of peace with Japan.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the ROK was not an “official” Allied Power and could not be a signatory, regardless of Korea’s moral claim to victimhood at the hands of Japanese imperialism. However, John Price notes that this reason was flimsy at best, not least because the newly-independent nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos would all attend and sign the treaty despite having been part of the French colony of Indochina until after the end of World War II.<sup>39</sup> The peace treaty, which supposedly signaled Japan’s rehabilitation in the eyes of the world, did a remarkable job of eschewing a key victim who would have benefited from “a peace of reconciliation” with Japan.

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<sup>38</sup> The 1942 UN Declaration formalized the Allies in WWII. Forty-seven nations ultimately signed the declaration between 1942 and 1945. "1942: Declaration of The United Nations". 2018. *UN.Org*. Accessed November 12; *FRUS 1951*, Volume VI, Part 1, Document 633.

<sup>39</sup> Similar observations could be made about other “Asiatic” states that participated, e.g. the US lobbied hard for Indonesian participation despite Indonesia only becoming an independent state after the end of World War II. John Price, “Cold War Relic: the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Politics of Memory,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 25, no. 3 (2001): 31-60, esp. 43-44.

Yet to label the ROK's relation with the San Francisco Peace Treaty as a "complete exclusion" would be a misnomer. Article 21 included treaty provisions whereby Japan officially renounced its claims to Korea and assented to Korean appropriation of Japanese properties left on the peninsula. Through the treaty, Japan promised to adopt favorable maritime, fishing, and trading relations with the ROK. Dulles summarized Korea's relationship with the treaty in a report for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: "[T]he treaty, in many ways, treats Korea like an Allied Power."<sup>40</sup> Significantly, however, the ROK was not included in particular treaty provisions, including clauses that encouraged Japan to negotiate reparations with former enemies. The participation of Indochinese states and the ROK having access to some, but not all, benefits of the treaty underlines the point that the ROK was clearly not denied a place at the table because of its colonial status during World War II. This raises the question: in the minds of American policy-makers, what could possibly have informed the criteria that determined inclusion or exclusion in the peace treaty?

The remainder of this chapter argues that, in American eyes, any concerns related to satisfying post-war moral claims of victimhood were decisively eclipsed by U.S. grand strategic interests. The obstacle to Korea's inclusion as a treaty signatory was not because of its lack of independent sovereign status during World War II. Korea was excluded because from the time when American post-war planners began drafting a peace treaty to when the peace treaty was signed in September 1951, American interests in the Asia-Pacific had become reified along newfound, Cold War lines. American decisions were informed by cultural assumptions about Koreans and justified by heightened Cold War tensions wherein the enemy was a monolithic

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<sup>40</sup> "Japanese Peace Treaty and Other Treaties Relating to Security in the Pacific," 19 Jan 1952, Box 7, Folder "Japan Subj. File [1 of 2], Allison Papers, Truman Library.

Communist threat of apocalyptic proportions. Fundamentally, Korean inclusion in the San Francisco Peace Treaty would have involved confronting the fundamental tension between American postwar grand strategy and past World War II idealism for a just peace.

In this way, Korea's tragic history under Japanese control simultaneously gave it the greatest reason to seek access to the peace treaty negotiations and doomed its self-advocacy from the start. With the Korean War still raging and a unilateral grand strategy crystallizing, American diplomats and policy-makers would prioritize expediency above all else.

## II. "The Situation in the West Pacific Will be Grave for a Long Time"

The San Francisco Peace Treaty was an American-led enterprise. Early U.S. diplomatic efforts had involved negotiating through the Far Eastern Commission (FEC)—a body of former Allied Powers designed to collaborate on postwar issues. However, these efforts ultimately failed in 1947 as the Chinese Civil War produced two separate "Chinas," poisoning U.S.-Soviet cooperation on the commission. Thereafter, the State Department drafted plans based on the assumption of American domination of treaty negotiations—an assumption to an extent justified by American perception of their outsized role in the Pacific theater. To this end, John Foster Dulles, as head of the U.S. negotiating team, traveled to the nations which would sign the treaty and negotiated with each government individually, essentially crafting a multilateral document out of a series of bilateral conversations. John Allison, a career State official who served prominently on Dulles' team, wrote after the fact that Dulles' strategy was designed to avoid

Soviet obstructionism.<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that deploying bilateral means for a multilateral end also would have enabled Dulles to maximize American leverage, as a dyadic interaction limited the chances for smaller powers to cooperate with one another against the United States.<sup>42</sup>

It was this context that enabled the United States to act as the primary gatekeeper for potential signatories to the treaty, although State Department officials remained cognizant of the interests of other major powers such as Great Britain and the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> Even before the *de facto* collapse of the Far Eastern Commission in late 1947, a State Department working group produced a treaty draft earlier that year that included had Korea, along with Indonesia, as signatories despite neither being Allied powers. An accompanying commentary justified Indonesian inclusion on the basis of its significant “human and material losses” and its status as a colony of an Allied Power during the war. In contrast, Korean inclusion was justified by noting that “as a liberated territory with a decades old resistance movement...and with an important interest in the treaty, [the ROK government] would doubtless feel entitled to participate, and would be resentful if the U.S. did not favor its participation.”<sup>44</sup> The commentary’s language is compelling. Indonesia was included merely because of its “losses” during the war and its status

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<sup>41</sup>“The Negotiation of the Japanese Peace Treaty and Possible Lessons it has for Today,” (n.d.), Box 7, Folder “Japan Subj File [2 of 2], Allison Papers, Truman Library; Allison, John M. (1905-1978), 1969, JFD Oral History Collection, esp. 24-26.

<sup>42</sup> Secretary of State Henry Kissinger employed a similar negotiating strategy in 1974 when attempting to resolve Arab-Israeli disputes after the Yom Kippur War. This strategy was referred to as “shuttle diplomacy”, as Kissinger would shuttle between the affected parties across borders and even between different hotel suites.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. diplomats produced a June 14, 1951 joint draft of the treaty with a UK diplomatic team, who themselves were worried about USSR obstructionism. Sung-hwa Cheong. *The Politics of Anti-Japanese Sentiment in Korea*, 88-93.

<sup>44</sup> “Commentary on 1947 Treaty,” Box 1, Folder “Commentary on the 1947 Treaty”, Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59, NACP.



as an allied colony. The motivation to include Korea, however, stemmed from the belief that the ROK would be resentful if excluded. Although the commentary does include Korea, it significantly believed that appeasing the “entitled” attitude of the ROK government was equally, if not more important than any moral standpoint that Korean wartime sacrifice or suffering under Japanese rule had earned the ROK a place at the table.

The depiction of Korean interests as perhaps-underserved “entitlement” harmonized with other existing American generalizations about Korea. American military occupation authorities in Korea had tended to cooperate with prevailing Japanese colonial bureaucrats in part because they generally viewed the Japanese as competent, experienced administrators and Koreans as obstreperous, obnoxiously nationalistic, and politically immature.<sup>45</sup> The Rhee government was similarly plagued by the image that their diplomats were nationalistic, to the point of overstepping the boundaries of the norms of diplomatic behavior. A report dated October 29, 1949 from a Japan-based State Department official advised against encouraging Korean-Japanese cooperation, citing the Korean ambassador’s “repeated and somewhat-aggressive attempts to deal directly with Japanese officials” as evidence that the ROK was only interested in extractive bargaining rather than rapprochement.<sup>46</sup> Multilateral negotiating with Korea and Japan, then, was out of the question. Even before the start of the Korean War, the State Department viewed the ROK government as prone to damaging careful American designs and motivated by inappropriate levels of undisciplined nationalism. Consequently in the American view, a Korean delegation could only be involved in the treaty negotiating process on a

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<sup>45</sup> Cumings. *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1*, 137-151.

<sup>46</sup> Report from W.J. Sebald to the Secretary of State, 29 Oct 1949, Box 4037, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59, NACP.

“consultative basis” as the ROK’s exclusion risked causing a troublesome outcry from Seoul and the Korean public.<sup>47</sup> Korean attachment to the peace treaty issue ensured that American diplomats would at least make a performance of hearing out Korean concerns, but without any expectation of taking those views into account.

*a. New Strategies*

However, by 1950-51 geopolitical developments and the intensification of Cold War tensions had changed the American calculus. In particular, American treaty planning for Japan evolved from a desire to prevent a vengeful resurgence of Japanese militarism (*a la* post-Versailles Germany) into a need to establish a friendly and strategically-additive nation to the American defense perimeter in the Pacific. American occupation authorities were certainly already perturbed by the possibility of anti-Americanism developing in Japan after either a prolonged occupation or a punitive peace treaty, but the ideological bent of avoiding historical mistakes slotted nicely into geopolitical concerns of checking the rise of Communism in Asia and in Japan.<sup>48</sup>

Japan was a key element of the Truman administration’s policy of containment in Asia.<sup>49</sup> “[T]he basic U.S. military objective in Japan,” so summarized a State Department assessment of

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<sup>47</sup> “Commentary on 1947 Treaty.” Box 1, Folder “Commentary on the 1947 Treaty”, Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59, NACP.

<sup>48</sup> John W Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), esp. 438-439; Schaller, *American Occupation of Japan*, 163-168.

<sup>49</sup> Containment was a U.S. foreign policy strategy, originally espoused in George Kennan’s 1946 “Long Telegram”, that advocated preventing the spread of Communism globally. Containment dictated much of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. As a strategy it can be contrasted with *détente*, which proposed warmer relations with the Soviet Union, and *rollback*, which promoted toppling communist governments.

the merits of a peace treaty, “[is] to ensure that in the event of a U.S.-USSR conflict, Japan is ‘on our side’ with its resources available to us and denied to the Soviets.”<sup>50</sup> To that end, the United States had to fend off internal Communist “subversion”, ensure that Japan reemerged onto the world stage on the side of the West, prevent the growth of anti-American sentiment, and optimize American control over Japanese policy.

A proper and speedy peace treaty, supplemented by a security agreement, could comfortably accomplish those goals and serve the foundation of a new and comprehensive American defense strategy in Asia. Waiting too long, American occupation and treaty planners both feared, could prove catastrophic if a Japanese communist movement were augmented by general Japanese resentment of a prolonged occupation. Rearming Japan, or otherwise building up Japan economically and politically to be a reliable strategic bulwark in Asia, was already an American priority in early 1950; these fears were only amplified with the North Korean invasion of the South in June.<sup>51</sup>

An atmosphere of contingency pervaded the air in Washington. The sense of urgency is perhaps best expressed by a March 18, 1951 letter from Dulles to General MacArthur, which Dulles had penned before he entered another round of treaty negotiations: “The United States and Japan are the only significant sources of power in the Pacific, we actual, they potential...If

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<sup>50</sup> “Advantages and Disadvantages of Indefinitely Continued Occupation or Conclusion of a Peace Settlement”, n.d., surmised to be May 1949, Box 5, Folder “Treaty Draft”, Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan 1945-1951, RG 59, NACP.

<sup>51</sup> For more information about the growth of Japan’s leftist movement during the occupation see Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 268-273.; W. Butterworth notes that the State Department obtained the Pentagon’s support for a peace treaty by arguing that the sooner a peace treaty was concluded, the sooner it would be politically feasible for Japan to be rearmed. *FRUS* 1950, Volume VI, Document 689; *FRUS* 1950, Volume VI, Document 728.

the United States and Japan fall apart, the situation in the West Pacific will be grave for a long time.”<sup>52</sup> The U.S. was now evaluating treaty issues through the far more immediate lens of its own imminent security concerns, which would directly affect the question of Korean participation.

### III. Pandora’s Box and the Korean Case

In some respects, American consideration of satellite issues tethered to the peace treaty was only slightly altered by the heightening Cold War. The nature of a peace treaty with Japan would not only determine Japan’s future, but also shape the American—and by extension, the free world’s—image in Asia. In a manner that resembled old Rooseveltian ideals of equality and cooperation among sovereign nations, State Department planners were anxious that a peace treaty avoided the image of amounting to little more than just another Western imperialist imposition.

As noted, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos ultimately signed the peace treaty. State Department reasoning for Indochinese participation was suggestive of American concerns about the makeup of the signatory states. On August 20, 1951, less than three weeks before the San Francisco Conference was slated to commence, Secretary of State Dean Acheson received a memorandum, issued under Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s name, advocating for the inclusion of the three newly-independent Indochinese states. Previously, invitations had been delayed over concerns that India, Indonesia, and Burma—all non-aligned states that the U.S. had been desperately hoping to include in the peace—might themselves refuse to participate in

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<sup>52</sup> *FRUS 1951*, Volume VI, Part 1, Asia and the Pacific, 1951, Document 532.

protest if “French puppets” were allowed in. However, the memorandum referenced new reports that the three non-aligned states might not participate in the treaty-signing regardless. In view of the fact “that in the last analysis India, Indonesia and Burma may refuse to sign the Treaty and as it is believed important for as *many Asiatic States as possible to sign*,” the memorandum concluded, “it is considered advisable to issue an invitation to the Associated States as soon as possible.”<sup>53</sup> The U.S. accordingly invited Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, which then attended as treaty signatories. India and Burma refused their invitations, although Indonesia still participated.

Rusk’s August 20 memorandum reveals that it was considered vitally important for American interests that “as many Asiatic states as possible” participated in the treaty-signing. His language shows how the State Department was invested in presenting the peace treaty as a joint document authored by Western and Asian states. It demonstrates that U.S. planners were doubtlessly conscious of the history of Western involvement in Asia. Earlier that year, the Far East Division of the State Department argued that Asian historical memory of European colonialism demanded the exclusion of some European allies from any potential security pact in Asia. “For example, the participation of the United Kingdom might imply a commitment regarding Hong Kong that the United States is not prepared to assume,” the memo stated, also suggesting American wariness about involvement on mainland Asia. “[UK involvement in an Asian security pact] might also lead to the desire of France or the Netherlands to participate which would give the arrangement a *“colonial” character of unfortunate effect in Asia.*”<sup>54</sup> Concerns about a “colonial” security pact would have translated to concerns regarding the

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<sup>53</sup> Emphasis added. Ibid., Document 699.

<sup>54</sup> Emphasis added. “Memorandum for the President,” 6 Jan 1951, Box 3, Folder “Peace Treaty”, Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan 1945-1951, RG 59.

motivations of the peace treaty. The State Department clearly wished to avoid the appearance of an imposition of Western interests onto Asia. U.S. involvement in Asia needed to be distinct from European imperialism and to avoid the accompanying negative colonialist implications.

The same concerns applied to American interests related to the peace treaty. In July, a political advisor for SCAP in Japan sent a telegram to Secretary Acheson, urging that the Americans avoid any behavior during the conference that might be perceived as belittling or discriminatory against the Japanese: “We [should] also constantly bear in mind that Japan is an Asiatic nation and that eyes of Asia will be upon San Francisco and upon [the] manner in which each and every Asiatic nation, including Japan, is [received] and treated by [the] United States and other ‘white’ nations.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, there could be no characteristically “colonial” behavior during the conference proceedings. Having many “non-white Asian” nations signing a peace treaty with Japan could plausibly promote the image that this treaty was the product of a collective, global effort rather than just American power and interests. Additionally, reinstating Japan as a member of the Asian community would also require the “approval” of other Asian nations.

“Asianizing” the treaty by increasing non-Western representation, however, raised additional questions about the role of the ROK. A Korean delegation might have been well-suited for the conference. For a Western audience, Korea was visibly an “Asiatic” and alien nation. In the broadest possible terms, Korea could serve the racialized role of another token foreigner that might legitimize the American-led peace treaty by simply being present in the conference hall. Its approval of Japan’s reinstatement would, crucially, be approval coming from an Asian country. Less cynically, Korean participation could fulfill the Rooseveltian vision of

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<sup>55</sup> *FRUS 1951*, Volume VI, Part 1, Asia and the Pacific, 1951, Document 663.

transforming the independence movements of oppressed peoples into sovereign nation-states, each at least nominally equal to one another in terms of certain legal and institutional criteria. The peace treaty could have contributed an ember to the wider hearth-fire of what Elizabeth Borgwardt described as “America’s multilateralist moment” during the waning days of the final Roosevelt administration, where the U.S. labored to ensure that the weak had at least a voice on the international stage.<sup>56</sup>

But while maximizing Asian representation at the peace conference was beneficial in public relations terms, such “Asianization” could not come at the cost of security priorities. Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were ideal signatories: they were visibly Asian and had comparatively little stake in the provisions of the peace treaty, thus posing no obstructions to American security designs that were linked to the treaty. Korea may have been an Asiatic state, but it was most certainly deeply interested in a treaty with Japan and vocal about its concerns. The transformation of American priorities and the ensuing mismatch with the ROK’s attempt to find moral redress for its colonial history serves to illuminate why Korea would not be at the table for a treaty purporting to turn a new leaf in relations between the West and Asia.

*a. Moral Redress*

Reparations, or the lack thereof, was an essential element of the negotiations leading up to the peace treaty. Even with the historical lesson of Versailles hanging over the postwar world in East Asia, forcing Japan to pay an indemnity for its wartime behavior would have likely been welcomed by many countries. The Potsdam Declaration, the document promulgated by the

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<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Borgwardt. *A New Deal for the World: America’s Vision for Human Rights*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 286-291.

Allied Powers that outlined the terms of Japan's unconditional surrender in July 1945, explicitly mentioned reparations as a strong possibility for what the Japanese could expect.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of the non-punitive inclinations of the Roosevelt-era State Department, immediate postwar drafts on reparations policy still made room for Japanese "compensation" for war damages to Allied countries and personnel. The ensuing debate about reparations and the role of Korea as a potential claimant reveals much about the transformation of American considerations regarding the peace treaty and deeper-held feelings about Korea generally.

Even though the United States had shelved the Morgenthau Plan for postwar Germany—a draconian plan that would have eliminated Germany's industrial capacity—similar deliberations persisted with Japan, framed by the notion that Japan should pay for its wartime behavior both through the pain of defeat and direct reparations. In October 1945, an American policy planning team led by businessman Edwin Pauley espoused an early draft of American policy with regard to the question of reparations. While retribution would not be the aim of American occupation, reparations in the form of industrial equipment should be delivered to other Asian economies devastated by the war, thus achieving the dual purpose of limiting Japan's war-making capacity and restoring regional economic stability.<sup>58</sup> In practice, Pauley's plans would have essentially amounted to a "pastoralization" of Japan, given the sheer level of industrial transfers that he recommended. Nevertheless, these postwar policy documents indicate that strategic and moral reasons for Japanese reparations were not mutually exclusive at first. State Department planners viewed the postwar devastation in Asia with anxiety. With no Marshall Plan for Asia or for Europe yet in the books, one of the most direct ways to rebuild the

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<sup>57</sup> "Potsdam Declaration: Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender," 26 July 1945.

<sup>58</sup> *FRUS 1945*, Volume VI, Document 745.



economies of the Asia-Pacific was through transfers of Japanese resources in the form of reparations. Korea, facing acute economic turbulence in the aftermath of Japanese colonial control, would have been an obvious potential recipient.

American policymakers did not ignore Korea during the early phase of reparations planning in 1945 and 1946. A December 8, 1945 letter from Pauley to General MacArthur and SCAP mentions Pauley's recommendations to President Truman that Japanese industrial plants and equipment in the home islands "formally used to exploit Korea, could be usefully transferred from Japan to Korea."<sup>59</sup> Although the fraught nature of the U.S. Occupation of Japan and Japan's fragile postwar stability forestalled Pauley's recommendations, it is significant that Korea held a place in America's reparations plans in late 1945. On February 28, 1946, a telegram from Secretary of State James Brynes stated that the United States and the Far Eastern Commission had decided that Japanese assets left in Allied countries would be eventually distributed in the form of reparations. Brynes explicitly mentions Korea, stating that Japanese assets would be held "in trust" by the American occupation authorities and eventually turned over to a native government "as recognition of Korean suffering at the hands of the [Japanese government]."<sup>60</sup> Despite the fact that there were few to no Korea experts in the State Department, planners still lumped Korea in with other nations designated "victims" of Japanese control.

In a time concurrent with the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials and a global *zeitgeist* that victims of militarized aggression should receive redress, it is not surprising that Korea's history alone—without any formal lobbying from an internationally-recognized Korean government—allowed it to have a powerful moral stature in the eyes of American planners. The technicalities

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Document 747.

<sup>60</sup> *FRUS 1946*, Volume VIII, The Far East 1946, Document 361.

of the absence of a U.S.-recognized Korean government-in-exile had little bearing on these early postwar documents.

In the immediate months after the end of the war, American pronouncements indicated no qualms about Korean eligibility for compensation. Yet, by late 1949, the State Department's policy had crystallized in complete opposition to Japanese reparations to Korea. In addition, many of the documents by State Department officials arguing against Korean inclusion in the peace treaty (and access to Japanese reparations) repeatedly mentioned that the Korean Provisional Government, Korea's government-in-exile, had never been recognized by the United States during the war, which would remove grounds for Korean status as an Allied Power. What could account for this change in attitude?

Early American pronouncements about the moral validity of Korean suffering at the hands of Japanese aggression may have aligned with American rhetoric at the time, but they failed to address more incisive questions about wartime reparations, their practicality, and American willingness to address the full scope of Japanese imperialism in Asia. As a result, empty American rhetoric was porous enough to allow room for changing strategic values and priorities to entirely change early plans and beliefs about Korea's place in the postwar order. Ultimately, the turn away from reparations had its supporters even among idealistic State Department diplomats, who could accept the wisdom that *post bellum* punishment was also amoral, against the spirit of the Atlantic Charter,<sup>61</sup> and might cause unforeseen, negative consequences in the future.

Unsurprisingly, the ROK government vociferously demanded reparations from Japan, and this was a source of concern for State Department planners. At face value, the concept of

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<sup>61</sup> The Atlantic Charter was a joint declaration by FDR and Winston Churchill in August 1941, where the two outlined the Allied war aims.

Korean reparations did not directly fit within the accepted idea of war reparations at the time. As noted, during World War II, the United States had not classified Korea as an Allied Power but rather as a colony of the Japanese Empire and subject to Japanese sovereignty. Although nations like the Philippines were not sovereign states when they were invaded by Japan, it was nevertheless indisputable that the damage caused to Filipino individuals and material assets by Japan were almost entirely tethered to the results of Japanese behavior during the war. Korea, as a colony under Japanese control effectively since 1905, instead asked for reparations for what it depicted as forty years of lost development and prosperity. Addressing the matter of Japanese reparations to Korea accordingly opened up a different line of questioning. How did its colonial experience mesh into the American understanding of the parameters of World War II? For the purposes of the peace treaty, how far back into the conflict in the Asia-Pacific could reparations apply?

Japanese restitution for damages to, say, an American-owned port in the Philippines during World War II easily fit within the traditional understanding of war reparations: compensation for the wartime activities of the designated aggressor. Korea, on the other hand, presented a far more extensive and complex set of indictments. Korea had been under internationally-recognized Japanese control for nearly forty years. Korean men had served in the Japanese military, many as conscripts but others as willing participants in Japanese-led institutions. Some Korean women endured sexual slavery as “comfort women,” an issue notorious enough that it persists as a controversy today. Many Korean landowners had been replaced with Japanese landowners after the 1910 annexation. Beyond individual damages, a variety of Korean resources from before 1910 had been depleted by 1945. Japan’s colonial occupation had appropriated cultural objects, gold deposits, bank funds, and land from Korean

ownership.<sup>62</sup> Simply tabulating Japanese “damages” to Korea was difficult due to the sheer length of time covered. So too would be verifying the validity of ROK demands.

Determining validity, however, was protean in the pivotal years after the end of World War II. Given that the Far Eastern Commission had turned into a forum for disagreement rather than a deliberative body to consult on postwar issues. The ROK and its moral claims and arguments about its role in the war were largely dependent on American priorities and the mindsets of key diplomats in the State Department. Although there were almost no objections to the transfer of ownership of Japanese assets left in Korea to Koreans—after all, the native seizure of leftover Japanese wartime property overseas was a universal desire among nations in the Asia-Pacific—the United States cooled towards the idea of reparations on the whole throughout 1947 and 1948.

The occupation in Japan underwent what historians have famously labeled as the “Reverse Course,” as a group of cabinet members and bureaucratic powerholders in the Truman administration opposed General MacArthur’s intentions to purge, democratize, and deconstruct Japan’s traditional corporations (*zaibatsu*). Rising tensions with the Soviet Union combined with fears of Japanese economic and political turmoil motivated members of the Truman administration to promote stability and a softened version of rehabilitation in Japan. As a result, reparations turned from a notion that American diplomats entertained to a taboo topic. This geopolitical reality was able to combine with the moral argument about the desirability of

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<sup>62</sup> “Participation of the ROK in the Japanese Peace Settlement,” 12 Dec 1949, Box 4, Folder “DRF 163”, Reports Relating to the Far East 1946-1952, RG 59, NACP. In particular, Section III, Part A1 “Claims of the Republic of Korea for Restitution and Reparations.”

rehabilitation instead of retribution, leading the U.S. to shift away from supporting institutionalized reparations.<sup>63</sup>

By January 1947, the U.S. outlined its guidelines for potential reparations claimants, who were still petitioning the Far Eastern Commission, in the form of a memorandum that circulated through the State Department. The memorandum reflected American interests in limiting the extent to which Japan might be held accountable for reparations. In a framing that forebode the future difficulty of Korean advocacy for involvement in the peace treaty (and access to reparations), the United States only invited “Belligerents to submit claims for the period of their actual belligerency” through the FEC. Korea, obviously not an official belligerent during the war, was left off the attached list of invited nations.<sup>64</sup> Included, however, were nations that used to be colonial holdings of Allied Powers and had since gained independence after the war. The Philippines is listed with its declaration of “belligerency” against Japan listed as December 7, 1941—indicating that the current Philippine sovereign state could retroactively claim to be a belligerent in the war against Japan since the day that its colonial authority (the United States) entered the war.

The date of belligerency for every nation listed is *after* December 7, 1941, which is to be expected since Japan never officially joined the conflict against the Allied Powers despite its pact

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<sup>63</sup> Schaller, *American Occupation of Japan*, 16; Schaller, Michael “MacArthur’s Japan: The View from Washington,” *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 1-23, esp. 3-5; Sakamoto, Yoshikazu. “The International Context of the Occupation of Japan”, in *Democratizing Japan: The Allied Occupation*, ed. Robert E. Ward and Sakamoto Yoshikazu (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987): 42-75, esp. 44-46; Schonberger, Howard. “The Japan Lobby in American Diplomacy, 1947-1952,” *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 46, no. 3 (Aug 1977): 327-359, esp. 329; Schonberger, Howard. “U.S. Policy in Post-War Japan: A Retreat from Liberalism,” *Science & Society* Vol. 46, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 39-59.

<sup>64</sup> *FRUS 1947*, Volume VI, Document 291.

with Germany and Italy until the Pearl Harbor attacks. While official date of belligerency match up with American guidelines, this generated a few curiosities. For example, the Republic of China's date of belligerency is listed as December 9, 1941.<sup>65</sup> Although the ROC had been engaged in conflict with Imperial Japan since at least 1937, it was only two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor that Chiang's Nationalist government formally declared war on the Axis Powers. While the guidelines that reparations claims could only derive from actions during the period of "actual belligerency" might not have had any actual effect on Chinese reparations claims (ROC officials could just as easily claim that certain damages from the five preceding years of war all occurred from December 9, 1941 on), the imposition of these formal guidelines indicates the limits of American understanding and receptiveness to reparations claims originating from before the American entry into the war.

Regardless of the local history of conflict with Japanese imperialism, the January 1947 memorandum highlights how American planners anxiously sought to re-center postwar issues on the idea of the outbreak of *global conflict* with the Axis Powers, regardless of any local history of conflict with Japan. Wartime reparations could only be just that—compensation for Japanese actions during World War II alone. In doing so, the United States had found a legal foothold that could limit how much Japan (and by extension, American foreign aid) would be responsible for redressing.

Beyond the obvious problems that the January 1947 framing of reparations issues posed for ROK interests in compensation, there was also greater symbolic significance of the American insistence that claims needed to be time limited. The broader scope of Japanese aggression in Asia, and its longstanding policy of colonialism, needed to remain outside the purview of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Document 291.

reparations and of a future peace treaty generally. From the American perspective, a peace treaty, being a multilateral document comprising all belligerents in the war with Japan, could not be charged with the responsibility of satisfying all complaints with Japanese behavior in the Asia-Pacific. Doing so was not only practically difficult, but also dangerous to American designs which required the speedy rehabilitation and retooling of Japanese assets.

But while other nations still had the opportunity to seek reparations claims, albeit only those damages originating from a limited time frame, Korea received no such accommodations. Korea was neither a former colony of an Allied Power or a recognized belligerent. It fit none of the categories the United States had laid out before it. The non-recognition of the KPG during the war had grave implications for postwar ROK efforts. The ROK was unable to successfully claim that Koreans had actively suffered on behalf of the Allied war effort whereas many other reparations claimants could argue on behalf of the sacrifices of their peoples and resources.

American diplomats believed that Korean claims did not stem from a genuine desire to receive compensation for damages incurred as a war combatant, but rather as an opportunistic, newly-independent country with a particular grudge against Japan. American reservations were summarized in a December 12, 1949 report published by the department's Division of Research for the Far East:

“While the claim of the Republic of Korea for participation in the Japanese peace settlement is based on its alleged status as a belligerent during the war and many of the present officials of the Republic of Korea have considered themselves belligerents against Japan since the annexation of Korea in 1910, the interests of Korea in the peace settlement appear to arise *more from the consequences of annexation and forty years of exploitation than from the war itself*, which was merely the incident that separated Korea from Japan.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Emphasis added. “Participation of the ROK in the Japanese Peace Settlement,” 12 Dec 1949, Box 4, Folder “DRF 163”, Reports Relating to the Far East 1946-1952, RG 59.

The report concluded: “[R]egardless of Korea’s legal status, Korean interests in the Japanese peace settlement are not derived primarily from belligerency against Japan in World War II...Instead, Korean interests are derived almost wholly from Japanese imperial rule over Korea during the period 1910-1945.”<sup>67</sup> Korea’s claims for war reparations and its signatory aspirations, the report declared, belonged to a separate conflict—the Japanese Occupation of Korea—whose sole relation to World War II was that it bore the same termination date.

For American policymakers, Japanese colonialism, or the colonial experience of Korea more generally, was not a valid point of conversation when discussing postwar policy. The United States could not be an accessory to what it saw as vengeance, especially when doing so would damage the most important American asset in Asia—a revitalized, allied, and subordinate Japan. In other words, America was instituting a new postwar order for Asia, but the State Department was accepting none of the responsibility for resolving persisting colonial controversies.

Notably, the December 12 report does not immediately suggest that the United States dismiss the Korean position out of hand. Instead, a determination of Korea’s status vis-a-vis the peace settlement would depend on “an estimation of the *line of conduct* likely to be followed by the Republic of Korea...”<sup>68</sup> The report revealed the criteria by which the State Department evaluated ROK claims that could have garnered Korea signatory status, albeit six months before the start of the Korean War. In other words, the “line of conduct” of a Korean delegation would have to be compliant and not an obstruction to American priorities.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



The ROK was not the only party involved that saw reparations as an important issue. The Philippines, too, lobbied heavily for reparations from Japan, which proved to be a point which the United States had to repeatedly fend off, usually asserting that Japan's brittle economy had no ability to pay.<sup>69</sup> Concerns about burdening Japan with reparations, for both ideological and strategic reasons, meant that even those nations who had clearly demonstrable claims of damages stemming directly from the war were nevertheless hard-pressed to find sympathetic American ears.

It was in this same vein that State Department officials gave the ROK's claims for damages short shrift. As the 1949 State Department research report described, "[The ROK's] claims appear to be excessive, as currently stated, and also pose a peculiar problem because of the long time period covered." The report goes on to conclude that if the U.S. allowed the ROK to participate in peace negotiations, Korean diplomats would likely demand a punitive treaty, due to both the Korean public's anti-Japanese sentiment and the ROK government's need to appear more anti-Japanese than the North. Ultimately, the report's authors advocated that the ROK be given a consultative, but *ultimately meaningless*, role in the peace settlement—something that would allow the United States to shut down any demands for excessive reparations but nevertheless satisfy the Korean public's "sensibilities on the question of participation."<sup>70</sup> In other words, to limit the ROK's role in a peace treaty to the minimum necessary to prevent rampant anti-Americanism in Korea.

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<sup>69</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between President Quirino and Ambassador Dulles." 12 Feb 1951, Box 7, Folder "Trip Philippine Papers", Records Relating to Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

<sup>70</sup> "Participation of the ROK in the Japanese Peace Settlement," 12 Dec 1949, Box 4, Folder "DRF 163", Reports Relating to the Far East, 1946-1952, RG 59.

Other American reports worked to diminish sympathy for Korean reparations claims. In May 1951, only a few months before the San Francisco Conference itself, the Department of Research for the Far East issued a report outlining the extent of originally-Japanese assets in southern Korea at the end of the war compared with Korean claims in Japan. After tabulating pre-war and wartime investment and Japanese-owned property values in Korea, the report concludes that “Japanese assets in the Republic of Korea alone [excluding assets north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel] were approximately four times larger than any ROK claims against Japan.”<sup>71</sup> Although the report does not take into account any value of ROK reparations claims, it serves the purpose of outlining how much the ROK had supposedly already benefited by appropriating Japanese assets and property in Korea at the end of the war. It also lends credence to the politically-charged and controversial assumption that Japanese occupation had also brought the positive externality of investment and economic development in Korea, altering the conversation from one of moral redress to that of a monetary exchange.

Of course, beneath the retraction of American willingness was the growing aversion to reparations generally. Rhetorically, top American policymakers began to emphasize the necessity of reconciliation rather than retribution. Reparations were dismissed for reasons of strategy and expediency, but represented a bigger moral question the US did not want to answer. The United States shuffled the issue of compensation off of the agenda of a multilateral document, instead separating itself from the matter of negotiating reparations and leaving all claimants to conclude separate bilateral agreements with Japan. Reparations ran counter to both American ideological

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<sup>71</sup> “Comparison of Japanese Assets in Formosa and Korea with Possible Korean and Formosan Claims in Japan,” 24 May 1951, Box 5, Folder “DRF-DR 229”, Reports Relating to the Far East, 1946-1952, RG 59.

concerns about avoiding the mistakes of Versailles and its forward-looking interest in rebuilding Japan as an ally amenable to American grand strategy.

*b. One Last Gasp*

The changing calculus prompted by a heightening Cold War would have further reduced Korean chances of participation given the ROK's rhetoric on the matter of reparations. But an argument can be made that the Korean War dramatically raised the prominence of the ROK government—Korea was no longer an Asian backwater; rather, it was part of the new front line against a monolithic Communist threat. Surely, on the basis of prosecuting the Korean War, the United States should have a greater incentive to curate positive feelings among the Korean public and the ROK government towards the West. Additionally, the ROK government might have had more leverage to argue that Korea deserved a place at the conference, given that it could frame its losses in the Korean War as casualties in the fight against global communism and thus a member of America's "free world" coalition.

Indeed, the ROK government did exactly that, often tying together its interests in a peace treaty with the American strategy of containment. By emphasizing the dangers of the external threat of communism, too, Korean diplomats sought to burnish the Korean reputation as scornful of an exonerating peace treaty, and therefore seek to disabuse Americans of the notion that a Korean delegation would somehow derail U.S. plans for the peace treaty. In November 1950, one Korean diplomat met with at least one top ranking American member of SCAP, and stated that "the war in Korea had convinced his Government that the greatest enemy of both [Japan and Korea] is communism, and that for this reason his Government is interested in seeing that a

treaty with Japan results in a just and honorable peace.”<sup>72</sup> Although his American counterpart equivocated with a diplomatic non-answer, the conversation demonstrates that the Korean government was not a passive agent after the start of the Korean War, instead finding ways to frame its advocacy for participation in the peace treaty through different ways that would be amenable to American sympathies.

Furthermore, the United States did begin to evaluate ROK participation in the peace treaty on slightly more expanded grounds at the start of 1951. Cheong Sung-hwa argues that the U.S. did indeed become more receptive towards ROK participation in early 1951. Dulles had expressed an interest in “building up” the ROK’s international presence and legitimacy. Bringing Seoul onto a multilateral treaty that symbolized the end of World War II and global reconciliation would reaffirm the ROK’s status as a valued, accredited member of the international system, which was important given that the United Nations had technically intervened in the Korean War on behalf of the ROK.<sup>73</sup> Although there is little to no evidence that Korean messaging in late 1950 had any impact on Dulles, both Korean diplomatic rhetoric and Dulles’ new interests reflected the role that Cold War developments reshaped old assumptions. Implicit in Dulles’ framing is the American belief that Korea did indeed have a role in contemporary American designs for Northeast Asia of some kind after the start of the Korean War. Inclusion on a peace treaty could very well be painless and limited in substance, but valuable symbolically. The ROK’s international legitimacy in 1951, then, was of enough importance that Dulles was using it as a criterion for determining signatory status. Subsequently,

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<sup>72</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Ambassador Sebald and Kim Yong Joo,” 24 Nov 1950, Box 1, Folder “Attitudes Towards a Japanese Peace Treaty 1950-51”, Misc. Records Relating to Japan and Korea 1945-1953, RG 59.

<sup>73</sup> Cheong, 80.

the U.S. team initiated discussions to obtain approval for the ROK's participation in the peace treaty.

These discussions encountered difficulties with the Japanese government, led by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru. Yoshida's government was concerned about Korean participation, not for reasons of potential reparations to the ROK, but actually because of what participation would mean for the legal status of Koreans residing within Japan. Japan feared that the 600,000 ethnic Koreans residing in Japan would be considered nationals of an Allied power, if the ROK were to be a treaty signer. The treaty had provided for nationals of Allied powers to be compensated for any property or wealth in Japan seized during the war. The Koreans living in Japan included both long-time residents and recent immigrants, but their legal status was now ambiguous and the ROK government claimed all of them as "Korean nationals."<sup>74</sup>

The Japanese government was determined to prevent Koreans in Japan from accessing the treaty compensation clauses for Allied nationals, which was motivated both by Japanese concerns about having to compensate wartime victims and a long history of Japanese racism and mistrust towards its Korean minority.<sup>75</sup> Pieces of an informal discussion between Shirasu Jiro, an advisor to Yoshida, and a State Department official, who was also a family friend of Shirasu's, on May 1, 1950 gives credence to the stipulation that personal attitudes of Japanese towards Koreans might have later affected treaty negotiations. As the State Department official later recounted, "[Shirasu] thought that the best way to deal with the 600,000 Koreans still living in Japan was to deport them to Korea. In his opinion, the Koreans in Japan were almost to a man

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>75</sup> Price, "Cold War Relic," 45.

engaged in illegal or non-gainful pursuits and that it was grossly unfair that the Japanese government ... [had to] assume obligations on behalf of this parasitic group.”<sup>76</sup> Still, on April 23, 1951, the Japanese government ultimately informed the United States that it would acquiesce in Korean participation “if it is definitely assured that by the said treaty Korean residents in Japan will not acquire the status of Allied Powers nationals.”<sup>77</sup> The most obvious source of obstruction had been cleared. Why then, after American treaty negotiators met with British diplomats later that month, did the U.S. inform the ROK on July 3rd that Korea would not be allowed to sign the treaty after all?

Cheong speculated that British lobbying against the ROK likely played a significant role. On May 16, John Allison issued a notice to Dulles that the United States, after conferring with the British ambassador, was now prepared to drop the issue of ROK participation. Instead, a new clause would be drafted to grant the ROK certain benefits of the treaty.<sup>78</sup> No records, to my knowledge, exist of the final meeting between the British and the Americans that tipped the scales against Korean participation. In the State Department’s published volumes of selected diplomatic documents, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, there is merely an editorial note that “Other reference of this talk has not been found in State Department files.”<sup>79</sup> The State

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<sup>76</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Butterworth and Jiro Shirasu,” 1 May 1950, Box 3, Folder “Peace Treaty”, Records Relating to the Peace Treaty with Japan, RG 59.

<sup>77</sup> “Supplementary Statement to the Conversation of Friday Morning, April 23, 1951.” 23 April 1951, Box 5, Folder “Second Tokyo Trip (April 1951)”, Records Relating to Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

<sup>78</sup> Such “certain benefits” are discussed in §1 of this chapter; Allison to Dulles, “Talk with Sir Oliver Franks Regarding Japanese Peace Treaty,” 16 May 1951, Box 1, Folder “Canberra Conference”, Records Relating to Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

<sup>79</sup> *FRUS 1951*, Vol. VI, Part 1, Asia and the Pacific, 1951, Document 576.

Department records in the National Archives at College Park, too, have almost no documentation as to what was said that indicates British reasoning for Korean exclusion or the specific grounds that led the American team to finally drop the issue.

However little we might know about what the convincing logic was, it is significant that the United States was prepared to drop the issue of Korean participation after only a handful of meetings with British negotiators.

Rhee and other ROK leaders had been arguing for Korean signatory status for almost two years, so it was clear to Washington that this was an emotional issue that mattered deeply to both the Korean leadership and public. Regardless of British views, the rapidity of U.S. concurrence indicates that the United States was already inclined to view the Korean case as unimportant in terms of the broader schedule of priorities and only gave it a second glance when Dulles believed that inclusion might boost the ROK's international status. For Dulles and other American negotiators, Korean participation might have had some merits, but by no means was it a hill worth dying on.

There were enough issues to make Korean participation in the treaty inconvenient and problematic. Korean demands for "excessive" reparations, the ambiguous status of the 600,000 Koreans living in Japan and whether they would be eligible for compensation for wartime mistreatment, compounded by British opposition, all meant that involving the ROK could delay the peace treaty, which was scheduled for September 1951. The peace treaty effort, a time-sensitive matter and a vital part of US strategy in Asia, could not be delayed by Korean interests.

The ROK Ambassador to the United States Yang would repeatedly seek reconsideration for Korea's case between July and September 1951. His efforts were met with a mixture of sympathetic but firm refusals and outright scolding for making a fuss. At a July 19 meeting

between Yang and Dulles, Dulles expressed frustration that Yang had made a press statement in which the disgruntled ambassador had asserted that Japan was not fully rehabilitated and had not satisfactorily made amends for its imperialist behavior in Korea. “Mr. Dulles pointed out the difficulty and delicacy of the position of the United States in its efforts to obtain a reasonable and satisfactory treaty with Japan...and stressed the importance, in this matter, of Korean understanding and cooperation.”<sup>80</sup> In August, Yang met with Assistant Secretary Rusk, making another pitch to the effect that Korean exclusion would be damaging at a psychological level to both the ROK government and the Korean people. Rusk brushed off Yang’s points, responding “that the absence of a Korean delegation should not be considered as a loss of prestige for [the] ROK, and that it might be wiser for [the] ROK not to make such an issue of the matter...”<sup>81</sup>

The chief attitude that seemed to characterize American responses is “annoyance”, as American officials had to devote energy to damage control after the decision to exclude the ROK. Dulles attempted to impress on Yang the importance of a cause larger than Korean issues. Rusk implied that repeated Korean lobbying was unnecessary squawking for the sake of national pride. Dismissiveness among American diplomats towards Korean lobbying was clearly still as prevalent in 1951 as it had been in the late 1940s, and dovetailed with American overall unreceptiveness to emotional Korean appeals.

As the date of the San Francisco conference drew closer, one State Department official did submit a proposal to have the ROK attend the conference as an observer, which would not allow the ROK to sign the treaty but at the very least allow a delegation to be officially

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<sup>80</sup> *FRUS 1951*, Vol. VI, Part 1, Asia and the Pacific, 1951, Document 647.

<sup>81</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Korean Ambassador Yu-Chan Yang and Dean Rusk.” 16 Aug 1951, Reel 9, Microform C43, US State Dept Special Files Japan 1947-1956, Files of John Foster Dulles, RG 59.



represented during the conference. The purpose of observer status would seek to smooth over ROK-Japan relations by diminishing any reason for the ROK to have a “chip in[*sic*] its shoulder.” The proposal author went on to say, “From a strictly moral point of view, it would seem only fair that the Koreans, who have suffered from Japanese oppression for more than 40 years, should be represented in some capacity in San Francisco.” Dulles personally responded to the proposal with a handwritten note, merely stating: “While from a strictly Korean point of view I agree with the above, I believe such actions would get us into many difficulties and open a Pandora’s Box which we would regret.”<sup>82</sup> The ROK was instead offered a downgraded invitation of being informal guests to the conference who could receive some assistance in booking their hotels—an offer to which the ROK did not respond.<sup>83</sup>

Dulles did not elaborate on what he believed was within that proverbial “Pandora’s Box.” But in an environment imbued with the need to implement American grand strategic plans as quickly as possible, we may speculate with some confidence that he already decided that Korean exclusion was the path of least resistance. Interpreted by Dulles, Korean issues and moral claim to wartime victimhood were insignificant compared to what the U.S. framed as the needs of the free world.

#### IV. Conclusion

The narrative of ROK exclusion from the San Francisco Peace Treaty reveals the tension among varying roles that the peace treaty could have performed. It was a grand strategic device

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<sup>82</sup> Johnson to Dulles, “Attendance of Korean Observers at Japanese Peace Conference,” 20 Aug 1951, Reel 10, Microform C43, Files of John Foster Dulles, RG 59.

<sup>83</sup> “Note of a Telephone Conversation between Dulles and Rusk,” 22 Aug 1951. Reel 10, Microform C43, Files of John Foster Dulles, RG 59.

that ushered in a political-security perimeter in the Pacific, but it also symbolized at least a modicum of rehabilitation, reconciliation, and redress for the past. It could deliver due attention to those nations affected by World War II and marginalized by “Allied power” designations. Additionally, American diplomats were conscious of Asia’s colonial past and had an opportunity to demonstrate that American leadership would be distinctly different. It is not surprising that the treaty failed to operate in all of its ideal ways. For the ROK, its moral claims to have a seat at the table with Japan suited neither American post-war intentions or Cold War strategy.

Korea arguably always had at least a small chance of achieving signatory status on the peace treaty. State Department planners struggled to fit Korea’s historical experience within the confines of the American understanding of World War II. American negotiators later latched onto the conclusion that Korea did not belong among the ranks of Allied powers when Korea’s claims of victimhood conflicted with the desired course of Japanese rehabilitation. Similarly, the process of “Asianizing” the peace conference was impersonal and not tailored to the specifics of individual Asian nations. It was ultimately guided by public relations concerns rather than a motivation to resolve the root causes of anti-Western and anti-colonialist attitudes in Asia. Consequently, Korea’s absence did little to delegitimize the U.S.-led venture, given the presence and tokenized function of other “Asiatic” delegations in the conference hall.

Presented side-by-side, Korean moral claims also paled in comparison to U.S. and other Western security concerns, at least from the perspective in Washington. Korea had always had an argument based on its moral right to be involved with the treaty, yet the United States only came close to inviting the ROK after the start of the Korean War and concerns arose about the ROK government’s international prestige. The American interest in corralling potential sources for anti-American sentiment argued in favor of Korean inclusion, but was also subordinate to

security concerns. Longer-held assumptions that the ROK might be obstreperous and muddle the treaty process came to the fore as Korea proved to be a less-than-ideal participant. Even though Korean participation in the San Francisco Peace Treaty might have built up the ROK's international legitimacy and the occasional American diplomat believed that the ROK had a moral right to be represented, most American negotiators essentially believed that the strategic advantage of the peace treaty was far greater than any matter of Korean national pride.

The result was a smoothly-run peace conference that concluded within two days but left the ROK government and public frustrated and resentful. Japan had formally recognized Korean independence and assented to the seizure of Japanese assets left in Korea. But Korea had been denied a chance to address Japan directly about its forty years of colonial status. Basic diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea would not be established until 1965, fourteen years after the peace treaty and six years after Dulles had died.

### Chapter 3

#### Multilateral, Multi-problematic

Security arrangements went hand in hand with the San Francisco Peace Treaty. By early 1950, the State Department had already reconceived the peace treaty as part and parcel of its wider security designs in Northeast Asia. At the same time as they were drafting the peace treaty, American planners had to conceptualize what the region would look like post-treaty. Scholars have been interested in the peace treaty for its role in spawning the retroactively-labeled “San Francisco System,” which itself is defined by the prevalence of *bilateral* security alliances between the United States and various countries in the Asia-Pacific. As many American diplomats and their foreign counterparts simultaneously engaged in discussions related to the peace treaty and security agreements, it is thus important to examine the nature of the security arrangements which stemmed from negotiating the peace treaty. The reasons behind the State Department’s support for a bilateral security architecture in Asia, after rejecting proposals for a multilateral alliance, in turn reveals new dimensions of American diplomatic decision-making which coincided and intersected with the peace treaty.

At the start of 1949, the United States had nearly no formal military agreements with countries based along the western rim of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>84</sup> The U.S. had had formal alliances with many nations in the Asia-Pacific during World War II, but with the end of hostilities with

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<sup>84</sup> The United States and the Philippines concluded a military bases agreement in 1947, which gave the U.S. a lease on multiple military bases in the country. However, it would only be until August 1951 that the two negotiated a mutual defense agreement. Additionally, the U.S. supported the Republic of China with economic and military assistance but was not obligated by any formal treaty stipulations until the 1952 Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty.

Japan and the lapsing of cooperation through the Far Eastern Commission, the U.S. was afforded a generous level of flexibility in terms of its policy in the region. Beyond occupation duties in Japan and the residue of cooperation with many other nations, the United States was informally bound to events in the region but formally detached. The period of 1949 to 1951 stood as a critical moment where the United States had the choice regarding how to shape and implement a comprehensive security structure for the region. In doing so, the U.S. not only evaluated its capacity and interests in the region, but also its confidence in involvement in Asia as well as its confidence in Asian partners.

The American emphasis on bilateral alliances and partnerships with countries in the Asia-Pacific stands in stark contrast to the American reliance on NATO—a multilateral military alliance—in Europe. Rather than encouraging cooperation between partners, the U.S. instead operated on a one-to-one dynamic, engineering mutually exclusive relationships between itself and other nations like Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, and others. But this outcome was never a foregone conclusion. Instead, in 1949-51 the United States encountered the idea of creating an alliance mirroring NATO in Asia, under the title of a “Pacific Pact.” The end result of American bilateralism in Asia only came after a brief period where the United States toyed with the idea of a broader multilateral security collective for Asia.

Unlike Europe, the United States faced what amounted to an unfamiliar landscape in the Asia-Pacific. A rapidly changing geopolitical landscape compounded by the respective fragility of potential partners incentivized American planners and diplomats to respond to and develop proposals on short notice, often choosing the path of least resistance. In the minds of American planners, “Asia” was a frontier fraught with uncertainty and self-interested allies. This promoted reactive measures with only hastily-sketched out evaluations of long-term results. Akin

to the bilateral negotiating style of the Dulles team with the San Francisco Peace Treaty, this chapter argues that the United States also sought to preserve maximum flexibility even whilst juggling its responsibilities as the largest diplomatic mover in the region.

Importantly, Japan was the only nation that the United States could have complete reliance on, and subsequently became the cornerstone of all future proposals and the centerpiece consideration when responding to Asian proposals. The United States did not necessarily believe that “Asianness” was an indicator of incompetence, but rather meshed together evaluations of the limited political/military capacities of certain Asian countries with cultural assumptions. With the advent of Cold Warrior mentalities and geopolitically-motivated fears, American policy-makers actively decided to maximize flexibility and freedom of action wherever possible. Fundamentally, Asia’s construction as a “frontier” and the western rim of the Pacific Ocean as an outward perimeter of American security, rather than the Pacific as a region with its own centripetal force, limited American beliefs at the time that any comprehensive involvement could be productive.

#### I. Indigenous Momentum, or the Lack Thereof

The United States and twelve other European nations signed the North Atlantic Treaty, which would lead to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), on April 4, 1949. Speaking at the formal treaty signing ceremony in Washington D.C., some representatives believed that NATO, although transformative, was only an evolution of past European efforts to create a collective union and alliance in Western Europe. “As we have participated in the making and implementing the Brussels Pact,” stated the Dutch Foreign Minister Dirk Stikker,

referencing the 1948 military alliance between France, the UK, and the Benelux nations, "...so shall we participate in making the [North Atlantic] treaty now before us a living and inspiring reality."<sup>85</sup> For Stikker, NATO's intergovernmental tendrils were not novel. They were merely an Americanized extension that worked upon well-trodden European efforts. In President Truman's address of the same day, a common theme was the emphasis of common interests overcoming national boundaries. "There are different kinds of governmental and economic systems, just as there are different languages and different culture. But these differences present no real obstacle to the voluntary association of free nations..."<sup>86</sup> Commonality and cooperation breaking past traditional boundaries was a colorful characteristic of U.S.-European diplomacy, and indicative of the American belief that regional stability in Europe was a net benefit for the United States.

While NATO negotiations had been underway for months, rumors also spread of a proposal for a mirrored alliance system in the Pacific. The Philippines, Australia, and Great Britain all indicated their interest in expanded American involvement in Asia, using a similar arrangement that American diplomats seemed so willing to implement in Europe. Both Australia and the Philippines were anxious about a resurgent Japan and saw themselves on a frontline with Communist machinations in Asia. Great Britain, although not promoting a military pact, carefully lobbied the U.S. to increase aid to Southeast Asia, citing the need to draw nations vulnerable to communism into a western orbit.<sup>87</sup> However, in a March 22, 1949 press conference Secretary of State Acheson dismissed the idea that the United States was at all considering a pact

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<sup>85</sup> "Addresses by President Truman and Foreign Ministers at Signing of North Atlantic Pact." *The New York Times*, 5 April 1949.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Mabon, 150-151; "Pacific Defense Pact 'Sympathy'". *The Observer*. 13 March 1949.

for the Pacific. “Acheson...pointed out that there are already existing agencies for handling problems in the Orient,” the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported, adding that Acheson cited the Far Eastern Commission and the Allied Council of Japan (ACJ) as examples of such agencies.<sup>88</sup> It should be noted that both the FEC and ACJ were organizations intended to oversee the occupation of Japan, but which were in effect subordinate to American prerogatives.

Yet, the concept of a Pacific Pact did not die overnight. Both Syngman Rhee’s government in South Korea and Chiang Kai-Shek’s regime, which was in the process of relocating to Taiwan, embraced the idea wholeheartedly. In early July, Chiang Kai-shek issued a joint communique with President Quirino of the Philippines, outlining their plans to establish a Pacific Pact as well as their motivation for such an alliance.

In view of the lack of close collaboration among [Far Eastern nations] in the past, and considering the gravity of the Communist menace which confronts their freedom and independence today, we deem it necessary that these countries should at once organize themselves into a union for the purpose of achieving solidarity and mutual assistance to contain and counteract that common threat.<sup>89</sup>

On the same day, Rhee endorsed the proposal with an effusive telegram from Seoul.<sup>90</sup> Despite a dearth of American interest in a multilateral alliance in Asia, those interested parties in the pact attempted to build their own momentum through public pronouncements echoing Truman’s rhetoric of common goals overcoming national boundaries.

American analysts were skeptical of the intentions of Rhee, Chiang, and Quirino. A July 15 memorandum from the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (ONAA) described the latest

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<sup>88</sup> Stokes, Richard L. “Acheson Denies U.S. is Turning Iran into Base.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 23 March 1949.

<sup>89</sup> *FRUS 1949* Vol. VII, Part 2, Document 330.

<sup>90</sup> Mabon, 153.



proposals from Rhee as little more than another iteration of Korean lobbying for aid that the United States was not prepared to give. “Korea...seeking arms and a U.S. military guarantee of its frontiers, has been most vociferous in advocating for a pact with US participation. Direct appeals for large supplies of arms and a US military commitment having failed, Rhee is heartily endorsing the [pact proposals], presumably hoping to attain his goals indirectly.”<sup>91</sup> Only a few days after the delivery of the ONAA memo, Secretary of State Acheson issued a telegram to several American embassies and echoed the memo’s assumptions. “DEPT considers Chiang-Quirino proposal for Pacific Union [as the] result [of] primarily [Chinese] Nationalist and Rhee initiative seeking supplementary means [to] appeal for US MIL aid and influence U.S. public opinion...”.<sup>92</sup> Functionally, Acheson instructed State diplomats to respond ambiguously to entreaties for a Pacific Pact, neither denying the possibility that the US could become interested in an alliance nor agreeing that such a future was close at hand. This approach fit an overall American attitude of wishing to encourage anti-communist governments in Asia while remaining fearful of involvement with unreliable or fragile regimes.

The State Department was right to believe that Syngman Rhee’s Pacific Pact proposals were not selfless. Two months earlier, Rhee plainly indicated that the ROK’s national security, rather than any belief in a broader collective vision, motivated his interests in a Pacific Pact. In May 16, Rhee publicly outlined that he hoped the U.S. would either (1) join a Pacific Pact including Korea, (2) adopt a mutual defense agreement with Korea alone, or (3) make a “public

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<sup>91</sup> “Chiang-Quirino Proposal for a Pacific Union,” 15 July 1949. Box 31, Folder “Pacific Pact (1949-1950)”, Files Relating to U.S. Participation in SEATO 1954-1977, RG 59.

<sup>92</sup> Telegram from Acheson to ‘Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officers.’ 20 July 1949. Box 31, Folder “Pacific Pact 1949-1950”, Files Relating to U.S. Participation in SEATO 1955-1977, RG 59.

declaration or pledge to defend a reunited democratic, independent Korea.”<sup>93</sup> Rhee’s statements that he valued a multilateral alliance equally with a U.S.-ROK defense agreement undercut any effort to present himself as a champion of Asian multilateralism. However, those motivations were ultimately similar to the *realpolitik* concerns of Western European nations that successfully sought an Atlantic Pact involving the United States earlier that year. In other words, a similar dynamic would have been at play: countries concerned about security seeking American defense guarantees of some kind.

The State Department adopted a variety of rhetorical arguments to push back against early Pacific Pact proposals. In May, Acheson ruled out the possibility of a Pacific Pact despite the looming collapse of the Nationalist regime in China, arguing that a pact would not be practical until the internal strife among Asian nations was resolved.<sup>94</sup> Holding up the NATO pact as a success story, Acheson outlined that Asian nations would have to demonstrate a similar level of political stability and self-initiative with multilateral alliances before the U.S. would contemplate joining a defense union.

Rhee was not a passive agent during this exchange of arguments. He soon held his own press conference and pointed out that he had reversed priorities. While Acheson listed a prerequisite—that Asian nations achieve internal stability prior to American support—Rhee was immediately concerned that Asian nations, especially his own, would not be able to maintain domestic stability *without* American support. For Rhee, the threat that faced noncommunist states like his own was internal communist subversion, and greater international support was

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<sup>93</sup> "Rhee Renews Appeal for Pacific Pact." *The Washington Post*, May 17, 1949.

<sup>94</sup> By the Associated Press. "Acheson Rules Out Pacific Pact." *The Washington Post*, May 19, 1949.

vital to preventing the possibility of his government toppling.<sup>95</sup> Waiting for issues internal to Asia to be “resolved” before the promulgation of a Pacific Pact could be catastrophic for the cause of anti-communism in Asia.

The disparity between Rhee’s and Acheson’s statements exposes the diverging mindsets that the two statesmen had regarding multilateralism in Asia generally, as well as the vastly different responsibilities that both nations would expect in an alliance. Rhee’s nakedly authoritarian rule had a shaky grasp domestically. In 1948 alone, two large-scale rebellions erupted in South Korea which the ROK government only suppressed after violent military crackdowns.<sup>96</sup> Simultaneously, Rhee was keenly aware that his 50,000-man military would be no match for the burgeoning DPRK army to the north, which far outnumbered the South. In 1949, the ROK was in no position to contribute to the material betterment of other allies. Acheson, and the U.S. government generally, may have also viewed the world with a mindset of contingency in 1949, as evidenced by American efforts like the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe and the creation of NATO that spring.

However, the combination of build-downs since World War II, defense sequesters, and the relative distance between Washington and hot zones around the globe resulted in a fundamentally different attitude towards events in East Asia. In the same vein of thinking that led to the Department of Army advocating for an early end to the occupation of Korea (to free up much-needed Army divisions for duties elsewhere in the world), the United States may have been willing to expend resources in clear crisis zones, but was not similarly generous with questionable partners in East Asia. After it became clear in 1949 that the Chinese Communist

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<sup>95</sup> Special to The New York Times. "RHEE SCORES ACHESON ON PACIFIC PACT ISSUE." *The New York Times*, May 21, 1949.

<sup>96</sup> Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War Vol. II*, 250-267.

Party would likely defeat Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, the United States had to come to grips with reality if it were to face a land conflict in Asia. After Chiang Kai-shek relocated to Taiwan, the United States would not have a powerful ally on the Asian mainland to call upon. Consequently, the tangible military resources designated for distribution in Asia were distinctly limited despite American profligacy in foreign engagements elsewhere.

Furthermore, the State Department repeatedly argued that the United States would not be responsible for engendering the level of collective spirit required for a multilateral arrangement to "work." In August 1949, after several months of ROK and ROC lobbying, Acheson telegraphed the American embassy in the Philippines, outlining the State Department view that the formation and development of an Asia-Pacific pact depended "on indigenous incentive and momentum developed in [the] countries concerned." Additionally, "In [the] DEPT's view, [the] coalescence [of a] viable [Asian union] can come about only through genuine self-discovery of common purpose and mutual need." The anti-communist stances of the South Korean, Nationalist Chinese, and Filipino governments, then, was apparently not a sufficient "common purpose." Most importantly, however, "encouragement by the US might well arouse expectations of US economic assistance to an association of [Asian] members beyond any [levels] now contemplated."<sup>97</sup> The chief opposition in official American policy to a Pacific Pact stemmed from this idea: that the U.S. would find itself required to support self-labelled "anti-communist" regimes in Asia and trapped in disadvantageous commitments.

There are several assumptions at play in the formulation of State Department responses towards a Pacific Pact. Firstly, the United States was not interested in producing a Marshall Plan for Asia or subsidizing ostensibly anti-communist states in the region. Early plans for the

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<sup>97</sup> Telegram from Acheson to the U.S. Embassy in Manila. 19 Aug 1949, Box 31, Files Relating to U.S. Participation in SEATO 1955-1977, RG 59.

Marshall Plan had actually included an Asian component—in 1947-48 future Secretary of State Dean Acheson had expressed a clear interest in rebuilding Asia as well as Europe. However, due to the difficulty of passing the already-contentious Marshall Plan through Congress, the Asian component was shelved. This move produced the Europe-only aid plan and left Congress to consider and pass aid bills to specific Asian nations on a case-by-case basis.<sup>98</sup> It would not be possible to fulfill all, or many of, the requests for aid from Asian allies.

Secondly, the United States was not convinced that the conditions were right for the U.S. to be involved in the creation of an Asia-Pacific pact. “Indigenous incentive and momentum” were required to formulate a pact. The resulting alliance, then, would be characteristically “indigenously”-produced and managed. The Pacific Pact, in other words, would not be adopted by the U.S. as an extension of an overarching global policy. Instead, it could only function as a club for Asian members to interact with one another, connected to the broader U.S. global grand strategy through their individual bilateral relations with Washington. Unlike NATO, which was surrounded by high-minded rhetoric on the importance of relations that crossed traditional geographic boundaries, the Pacific Pact of 1949 had distinctly “Asian” connotations. Such a connotation, as opposed to potential shared interests like non-communism or fighting for peace in the world, limited its relevance to the United States. In the eyes of American policymakers, at least publicly, they designated a Pacific Pact as strictly an “indigenous” affair that could only solve “indigenous” problems, not global ones. Whereas American diplomats saw themselves as in the thick of matters in Europe and actively taking the initiative to influence the course of events, the Asia-Pacific was a different story. The U.S. would not take the bait and find itself involved on a frontier from which it was separated—not conjoined—by the vast Pacific Ocean.

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<sup>98</sup> McGlothlen, 55-59.

American charges that the 1949 Pacific Pact proposals lacked “indigenous momentum” also provided a contrast that helps explain hearty American cooperation through NATO. NATO, American diplomats stated, was not an American-headed institution or an original American concept—rather, it was the evolution of existing European efforts at multilateralism prior to the formulation of the North Atlantic alliance. A history of regional multilateral cooperation, then, was “proof” that potential participants would be genuinely interested in lowering national barriers among themselves, rather than simply using a multilateral arrangement to extract aid from the “big” power in the alliance. To define “momentum” in a diplomatic sense, it would involve both sustained and transnational enthusiasm for an idea as well as the conclusion of other international agreements and pacts that could eventually point towards a NATO-like alliance involving the U.S.

Such a prerequisite may have been understandable in a practical sense. If the United States entered into an arrangement with nations that already had seasoned diplomatic corps, foreign policy institutes, and experience with international political-military cooperation, such an arrangement would subsequently require less training, effort, and leadership responsibilities from the U.S. In a qualitative sense, too, historical evidence of multilateralism would indicate the “sincerity” of potential parties’ interest in a pact. On the other hand, it makes little sense to argue that a history of multilateralism was required given that many potential Asian members were newly-independent countries. The Republic of Korea would have simply had no opportunity to acquire the level of pre-alliance historical experience necessary to satisfy Acheson’s listed prerequisites prior to the formation of a Pacific Pact.

Additionally, two of the main parties calling for a pact—the ROC and the ROK—had leaders and governments with little standing in the eyes of American diplomats. Although

military and political limitations on American commitments abroad would have engendered lukewarm responses to the pact proposals of 1949 anyways, the sense that both Chiang and Rhee's government were riddled with corruption and incompetence generated the perception of an even more unfavorable environment in Asia beyond the already difficult security issues.

Another clue answering why the U.S. responded coolly to the idea of a Pacific Pact lies in a memorandum sent between from an Asian affairs analyst to the Near Eastern Affairs department within the State Department on March 1950. In a curious line of reasoning, the memo argues that a Pacific Pact would entail a concrete defense line in Asia, and in doing so, would consequently *expose* more countries than it would protect. A formal defense agreement in the Far East would have to be followed by agreements in South Asia and the Middle East, so as to not spark feelings of "abandonment" by those nations outside of the Pacific Pact.<sup>99</sup> In other words, formally defining the extent of American commitments was dangerous, inflexible, and risked serving as a trigger for other commitments elsewhere. If definition posed risks, then the solution is to be indefinite. American rhetoric could remain equivocal, vague, and generally supportive, which would allow foreign nations to continue to believe that American support could be forthcoming in the future.

The United States would have seen the creation of an anti-communist pact in Asia as too draining on American resources and too definitive in terms of who the pact would both protect and protect against. In 1949, ambiguity, in terms of reducing anxiety about the availability of American aid, was the best course of action when the United States itself had no long-term projection for its commitments in the Asia-Pacific.

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<sup>99</sup> "Memorandum from Mr. Hare to Mr. Howard, Subject: Japanese Peace and Security Settlement." 17 March 1950, Box 1, Folder "Butterworth's Peace Treaty Files", Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

## II. Coopting the Pact

Despite the 1949 pact proposals fizzling out by the end of the year, the term “Pacific Pact” saw a revival beginning with the commencement of negotiations for a Japanese peace treaty. Strangely enough, American diplomats floated the idea of a multilateral alliance and sounded out interest from its partners in the Pacific, even though less than a year earlier the State Department had dismissed a Pact as premature and lacking the requisite enthusiasm among potential participants. Instead, as the peace treaty transitioned from existing solely on the drafts of State Department planners to an international negotiating process, the United States found itself willing to exert the necessary force which could not only formalize an international peace treaty, but also a collective alliance for Asia.

Of course, American proposals for a “NATO in Asia” never came to fruition, much like the Chiang-Quirino-Rhee proposal. By April 1951, the State Department abandoned plans for a multilateral arrangement, repurposing collective security designs into a series of bilateral agreements. Those agreements culminated in the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, the Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and the Philippines, and the ANZUS Treaty, which bound together Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. Despite the non-event of a 1951 Pacific Pact, the reasons for both American initial intentions and eventual dismissal of the idea reflect the priorities, mindsets, and strategic considerations of the State Department and other government planning agencies at the time. Risk was avoided and flexibility maximized. Additionally, despite renewed American interest in a pact, Korea was distinctly absent from any proposals. Korean exclusion at this stage brought to the fore the recurring strategic and geopolitical reservations the United



States had towards involvement in Asia, and also emphasized the contingent, coincidental nature of American support for the ROK during the Korean War.

*a. Towards a NATO in Asia*

American reliance on Japan was promoted by Cold War considerations, but had difficulty reconciling with lingering wartime and postcolonial fears from other Asian nations. As discussed in the previous chapter, Cold War-motivated mindsets led American planners to pivot towards restoring Japanese sovereignty, in order to bolster American capabilities in East Asia. Yet the American about-face in its attitude towards Japan was far from universal among nations in the Asia-Pacific. Largely spared from the dangers of bombings, occupation, or invasion, American diplomats could not look within their own wartime experiences in order to sympathize with the tepid response of nations along the western edge of the Pacific Rim when announcing the end of the occupation in Japan. For countries like Australia, the Philippines, and especially the ROK, simply labeling Japan as “rehabilitated” did little to assuage the fresh memories of Japan’s imperial ambitions. The United States faced the difficult task of reassuring both its partners and other global observers that the end of its occupation in Japan would not endanger long-term regional security while seeking to obtain short-term advantages against the Soviet Union and the PRC.

Embedded in a May 5, 1950, draft from the Assistant Secretary of Far Eastern Affairs at the time is a discussion of the two types of concurrent security arrangements discussed by the U.S. government, although the author of the draft deemed neither as entirely acceptable to American interests yet. The first possibility could be a “collective security arrangement” with common standards of mutual defense among any participating nations. The second possibility

would be a quasi-continuation of the status quo, where SCAP and other Allied occupation authorities in Japan would exercise sovereign control over Japan's foreign policy and defense. In either case, the author underlines the importance of the United States maintaining a strong grip on events in Japan and the region: "The United States and its friendly Allies must continue to be secured against the possible resurgence of Japanese aggression and Japan must continue to be secured against possible Soviet-Communist aggression."<sup>100</sup> A collective alliance, then, was a convenient option that could bring American partners in the Asia-Pacific region together with Japan and one another, united by a common goal of anti-communism.

The predominance of security issues was reflected in the composition of Dulles' negotiating team. When Dulles set off in the summer of 1950 with a small team to begin treaty negotiations, he borrowed a young colonel, C. Stanton Babcock, from the Army General Staff to serve as his advisor on military issues. Babcock later recounted, "In our travels to Europe, the Far East, and to Australia and New Zealand, it became more and more apparent that acceptance...of a generous peace treaty depended, very materially, on the drafting of strong security pacts which would satisfy the nations which had been victims of Japanese aggression."<sup>101</sup> Dulles' briefing papers, prepared for him by State Department planners who had labored over treaty drafts prior to Dulles' appointment as a special negotiator, also included the recommendation for a multilateral security pact to be negotiated alongside the peace treaty.<sup>102</sup> A

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<sup>100</sup> "Interim U.S. Position in Relation to a Peace Treaty with Japan." 2 May 1950, Box 1, Folder "Butterworth's Treaty Files", Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

<sup>101</sup> Major General C. Stanton Babcock (1904-1979), 1964, JFD Oral History Collection.

<sup>102</sup> It is important to scrutinize Butterworth's testimony carefully, as he personally had a low opinion of Dulles due to Dulles' tenure as Secretary of State. Butterworth, nevertheless, confirms that the eventual negotiation of several bilateral alliances was not the original plan prepared for him—Butterworth himself disagreed with this move as he felt there was no easier

collective alliance, akin to NATO, could simultaneously solve the dual issue of assuring wary allies about Japan's reinstatement and initiate a security order in the region for the future.

Nowhere, however, did Korea feature in those security pact ideas.

Military disadvantage was a major reason behind American disinterest. On November 3, 1950, Acheson drafted a statement that attempted to analyze the events in Korea in context: "As far as the future position in Asia is concerned, it would seem that we must now more closely limit ourselves to areas subject to sea and air power, which fits our natural role." America's intervention on land in Korea, then, was a grave mistake in Acheson's eyes. Similarly, Acheson's statement reveals an intense feeling that the U.S. had few partners it could rely on in Asia, declaring that it was "important to accelerate some understanding with Australia and New Zealand, the only two dependable countries in the Pacific Area."<sup>103</sup> Acheson's beliefs towards the limited capacity and reliability of Asian nations cut directly against any plans for a Pacific Pact. If the Secretary of the State felt positively about only the two predominantly white countries in the region as potential members of an alliance, there was evidently little of the necessary enthusiasm needed to inaugurate a pact. Acheson's language, too, hints at larger racial assumptions about whether non-white, formerly colonized countries were could be "dependable." The belief that non-white Asian nations lacked the sophistication or political experience to be dependable American allies would also have especially limited Acheson's interest in a multilateral arrangement.

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time for the U.S. to pull off a multilateral alliance than in 1950-51. Butterworth, W. Walton (1903-1975), 1965, JFD Oral History Collection.

<sup>103</sup> "Estimate of the Situation," 3 November 1950. Box 47, John Foster Dulles Selected Correspondence, John Foster Dulles Papers, Public Policy Papers, RSBC, Princeton.

Acheson's concerns about land involvement were echoed by Defense officials. A January 4, 1951 memo cited a meeting between State Department officials and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "[T]he Joint Chiefs made it clear that the Pact which they had in mind should be *strictly confined* to the island nations of the Pacific (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, the United States, and possibly Indonesia)..."<sup>104</sup> Above all else, the Defense Department feared involvement in a war on the general Asian mainland. Its defense perimeter, drawn on the western rim of the Pacific, reflected that geographical limitation. Accordingly, a Pacific Pact could only involve those nations where the United States could bring its naval and air power to bear.

Such a cautious attitude would be perfectly understandable prior to the start of the Korean War and the implementation of NSC 68—the April 1950 document that called for the tripling of America's defense budget. However, by January 1951, the United States already had more troops deployed in Korea than in any other country in the world. The ignition of the war sparked an immense flow of aid, men, and resources to the ROK. Such a transfer of capacity and commitment to Korea could not be easily reversed, especially as the situation on the peninsula stabilized and the dramatic gains and losses of the early months of the war settled into a stalemate roughly along the thirty-eighth parallel. For what reasons would Korea be excluded from broader security designs in 1951?

*b. The Impact of the War*

American involvement in Korea, under the banner of the United Nations, had direct implications for future security designs in Asia. Korea, itself, transformed dramatically in the

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<sup>104</sup> Emphasis added. "Memorandum from Allison, Subject: Pacific Pact." 4 Jan 1951, Box 1, Folder "Defense Dept-Correspondence With", Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

ensuing upheaval and violence. After the June 25, 1950 invasion of South Korea by the DPRK, the U.S. faced a decision of whether or not to intervene in the conflict. The Truman administration entertained a number of possibilities, including whether the invasion was a Soviet ploy to test American resolve. But Korea's strategic position relative to Japan raised the possibility of a communist threat sitting across a narrow strait to the Japanese home islands, which would have been unacceptable for American security plans.

Additionally, the American intervention was also motivated by concerns of preserving American prestige in Asia. On the day of the North Korean invasion of the South, Dulles and his advisor John M. Allison were visiting Tokyo in early treaty negotiations with Japanese leaders. Merely a week earlier, both diplomats had visited Seoul in a show of American support for the Rhee regime. Dulles and Allison, only hours after hearing news of the North Korean invasion, issued an urgent telegram to Acheson:

It is possible South Koreans may themselves contain and repulse attack and, if so, this is the best way. If, however, it appears that they cannot do so then we believe US force[s] should be used...To sit by while Korea is overrun by unprovoked armed attack would start a disastrous chain of events leading most probably to world war.<sup>105</sup>

The tenets of containment rested upon an American show of force wherever necessary. The psychological factors at stake were more explicitly stated in a telegram several days later from Acheson to U.S. embassy diplomats: "Importance of the Korean situation not great from strategic standpoint, but as symbol of strength and determination of the US it is vital." The United States would commit to the ROK's defense, not for Korea's sake, but in order to present

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<sup>105</sup> Telegram from Tokyo to the Secretary of State, 25 June 1950. Box 4, Folder "1. Immediate North Korean Aggression Reaction", Korean War File, Truman Library.

the image that American partners would be supported against Communist aggression.<sup>106</sup> Such a move would reassure Japan as well as noncommunist states in the Asia-Pacific. Korea, regardless of the reasons, was now at the forefront of American involvement in Asia.

But the realities of American commitments on mainland Asia remained and the reversals in the Korean War confirmed American pessimism that its advantages lay in the sea and air. The PRC intervention in Korea in late October 1950 dashed American hopes for a quick end to a war and reignited the belief that the U.S. simply did not have the capacity to win a large-scale land war in Asia. As UN troops streamed back to the thirty-eighth parallel and Chinese attacks destroyed the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division at the Battle of Unsan, Acheson authored his November 3 memorandum cited earlier, where he claimed that the U.S. should stay away from commitments in areas on the contiguous Asian mainland. However, Acheson continued in that memorandum by arguing that the U.S. should hold parts of South Korea regardless of the cost as a defeat would “put Japan in a position where the nation would probably reconcile itself to falling into Soviet communist orbit.”<sup>107</sup> Far from launching the ROK to the center of American future interest, the course of the Korean War actually confirmed American beliefs that any Pacific Pact should explicitly not involve the Korean peninsula. Korea remained important, militarily, only in context of securing Japan.

The uncertainty involved with commitments in Asia directly influenced American diplomats when considering the nature of the Pacific Pact. The dangers in Asia meant that there was a smaller margin of error involved with negotiating a multilateral alliance that would have

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<sup>106</sup> Outgoing Telegram to ‘Certain American Diplomatic Officers’, 28 June 1950. Box 4, Folder “Immediate North Korean Aggression Reaction”, Korean War File, Truman Library.

<sup>107</sup> “Estimate of the Situation,” 3 November 1950. Box 47, John Foster Dulles Selected Correspondence, John Foster Dulles Papers, Public Policy Papers, RSBC, Princeton.

unequivocal definitions on the nature of American involvement in the region. The pact retreated from the ostensible purpose of its name and settled back into the role of permitting the completion of the American-led negotiations of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and serving as a tool in Dulles' toolbox. Although memoranda and policy proposals still used the same label—"Pacific Pact"—that Chiang Kai-shek, Quirino, and Rhee had used back in 1949, the Pacific Pact proposals under American guidance of 1950-51 were motivated by fundamentally different reasons.<sup>108</sup> It appeared to have the same window dressing as the Pact proposals of 1949—and by extension—the North Atlantic Treaty, but this new pact was not an objective in itself. A Pacific Pact tethered to the San Francisco Peace Treaty was intended to allay the suspicions of potential partners, and to demonstrate that the United States was *potentially* willing to support nations in the Asia-Pacific even when it had no material commitments it was prepared to offer. Such an instrument was necessary given the risks of being definitive and purposeful.

Early setbacks in the Korean War also increased the need for propaganda efforts that would assert American solidarity in Asia. A January 4, 1951 memo co-authored by Assistant Secretary for the Far East Dean Rusk circulated through the State Department, outlining the benefits of a "Pacific Declaration". A Pacific Declaration would be thematically linked to proposals of a security-based Pacific Pact, but in effect be entirely separate and disconnected from the requirements of any multilateral alliance. "A declaration of purposes, which did not of itself establish the machinery for collective security, would be drafted primarily for its propaganda effect," the memo states. "It would therefore be designed to *dramatize* the community of interests of the nations participating, [and] their concern for the peoples of

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<sup>108</sup> Mabon, 158.

Asia.”<sup>109</sup> There are several layers of analysis which to parse through here. Firstly, the declaration would serve to reassure anxieties among Pacific nations about American security guarantees through symbolic gestures, making up for the absence of tangible movements towards effecting an alliance. Secondly, the use of the verb *dramatize* indicates both Rusk’s own feelings regarding the lack of actual communal interests among Asia-Pacific nations, as well as reaffirming the declaration’s role as a propaganda tool.

Additionally, the memo reveals that any declaration, and a subsequent pact, would be as much directed at the participating nations as it would be for a broader audience. “...every effort should be made to convince nations in Southeast Asia, for instance, as well as the people of China, that the interests of the people of Asia were [of] concern [for] the [pact’s] members.”<sup>110</sup> The Far Eastern division of the State Department had circulated a similar memo in December 1950, advocating that “The psychological effect in Asia of a Pacific Declaration would be particularly important at the present time. It would tend to strengthen the non-Communist nations of Asia, to counteract the loss of prestige suffered through events in Korea, and to encourage resistance in Communist-controlled areas.” The memo also argues that the participants of the declaration would be chosen in order to signal to Asian nations that the United States was open to the idea of committing itself to anywhere it needed to in Asia.<sup>111</sup> Ambiguity about American intentions and limits, again, served the State Department well at a time when there was no consensus about the extent and long-term plans of American designs. Additionally, a statement

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<sup>109</sup> Emphasis added. “Memorandum from Rusk and Emmerson, Subject: Pacific Pact.” 4 Jan 1951, Box 1, Folder “Defense Dept-Correspondence With”, Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Emmerson, J.K. “Pacific Declaration”, 12 Dec 1950, Box 1, Folder “Defense Dept.-Correspondence With”, Records Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.



of purpose and an affirmation of the community of interests between the U.S. and non-Communist Asia, regardless of the actual absence of actual feelings of camaraderie, could bolster America's prestige in Asia.

In a time when reversals in Korea demonstrated how the sheer gravity of a misstep in Asia, the United States faced the task of simultaneously ensuring that noncommunist resolve would not collapse while refining security designs to avoid a future catastrophe. In a National Security Council report dated May 17, 1951, the NSC outlined its belief that American involvement in Asia had both direct effects—countering communist aggression—and psychological importance. “The effect of the Korean struggle upon the military and political prestige of the participants is of the greatest importance to the course of events in other parts of Asia.”<sup>112</sup> Korea could not be abandoned, for the sake of America's standing abroad and Japanese security. But its potential as a key member of American grand security designs for the future of Asia was distinctly limited by its difficult strategic station.

*c. Korean Relations with Japan*

Furthermore, Korean involvement in a Pacific Pact would have required addressing the nature of ROK relations with Japan. Resolving outstanding issues that contributed to the acrimony between the two nations was far easier said than done. Throughout the negotiation of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, American diplomats underplayed Japanese war responsibility, which was a necessary aspect of the U.S. strategy of reinstating Japan without reparations. Korean nationalism, Rhee's anti-Japanese public demeanor, and understandable resentment towards Japan as well as Japanese insouciant attitudes certainly contributed to acrimonious post-

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<sup>112</sup> *FRUS 1951*, Volume VI, part 1, Document 12.

war relations between the ROK and Japan. But American officials had low expectations that Rhee's diplomacy with Japan would be productive as well as little interest in promoting Korean interests. As a result, Korean-Japanese diplomacy remained unproductive, and limited the possibility that the ROK could successfully present itself as an attractive member for a multilateral alliance that would involve Japan. Once again, American diplomats sidelined Korean concerns, by perceived necessity, because while Korea may have been the crucible of American military intervention in Asia, Japan was the cornerstone of American grand strategy.

Rhee, publicly, had contradicting stances towards Japan. On the one hand, he saw the need for a potential anti-communist partner. On the other hand, the pressures of public anti-Japanese sentiment, as well as his own interest in presenting himself as an ardent Korean nationalist, led Rhee often to espouse anti-Japanese rhetoric.<sup>113</sup> American diplomats thus had good reason to believe that Korean motivations ran directly counter to the U.S. effort to prioritize Japanese recovery. As recounted in Chapter 2, these views were evidenced by the American report of the brusque ways the Korean minister to Japan attempted to gain an audience with the Japanese government in October 1949.<sup>114</sup>

However, there was also a push within the ROK government to integrate itself in Asia regionally and even to restore relations with Japan. There was a concerted effort within the Rhee government to establish better avenues of contact with the Japanese directly. This was, in part, due to Korean perceptions that an American-sponsored dialogue would be biased against ROK

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<sup>113</sup> Cheong, 138; Parrott, Lindsey. Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES. "Japanese Resent Korean President's Demand for Tsushima Islands, Close to their Coast." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 20, 1948.

<sup>114</sup> Report from W.J. Sebald to the Secretary of State, 29 Oct 1949, Box 4037, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59, NACP.

interests. In September 1949, Rhee stated in a press conference that “Because there are some Americans who like Japan, they act in favor of Japan in some points.”<sup>115</sup> The ROK initiated several attempts beginning in October 1949 to generate trade with Japan, as well as an exchange of Japanese technicians and anti-communist intelligence-sharing. The American response to these overtures was mixed. Marshall Green, an analyst at ONAA in the State Department, commented that the Korean efforts may “disclose a genuine concern on the part of Rhee...and other Korean leaders for closer ties with Japan. An almost isolated bit of anti-Communist soil in the North Asian continent, Korea has a good reason to look for a friend in Japan. Such a Korean-Japanese rapprochement would seem to be in U.S. interests.”<sup>116</sup> At the same time, however, a SCAP diplomat added his belief that these Korean overtures were of dubious value.<sup>117</sup> Green himself admitted that “[Japan] has traditionally viewed the Koreans bordering on contempt,” and that animosity along with the low practicality of Korean-Japanese intelligence sharing would doom a Northeast Asian anti-communist front before it could get started.<sup>118</sup>

ROK efforts to turn a new leaf in ROK-Japanese relations increased with the growing threat of the DPRK and especially after the start of the Korean War. In a February 1950 visit to Japan, Rhee himself emphasized the need for cooperation in light of the threat of communism

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<sup>115</sup> Rhee quote comes from a 30 Sept 1949 press conference, which is reprinted in part in the following source: Letter from William Sebald to Secretary Acheson, “Korean-Japanese Relations,” 29 October 1949. Box 4037, Folder 794.95/1-145 - 12-3149, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59.

<sup>116</sup> “Office Memorandum from Green to Allison.” 29 October 1949, Box 4037, Folder 794.95/1-145 – 12-3149, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from William Sebald to Secretary Acheson, “Korean-Japanese Relations,” 29 October 1949. Box 4037, Folder 794.95/1-145 - 12-3149, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59.

<sup>118</sup> “Office Memorandum from Green to Allison.” 29 October 1949.

and concluded several trade deals with Tokyo.<sup>119</sup> One year later, after Korea had experienced firsthand the instability and violence of the early months of the war, the ROK took efforts to tone down its own concerns. The ROK National Assembly became increasingly aware that the United States planned on excluding Korea from both a Pacific Pact and the peace treaty. This awareness led the Assembly to pass several motions indicating that they would have no objection to a Pacific “alliance” that would include Japanese armed forces. In other words, Japan could be rearmed, so long as Korea was not left outside of a pact’s defense line.

The U.S. embassy submitted dispatches summarizing the assembly’s legislative proceedings, including the transcript of one Korean assemblyman who stated that in the interest of creating a Pact with the United States and Japan, “[w]e must discard the nationalistic sentiment we have had in past days.”<sup>120</sup> The accompanying commentary by the American ambassador, John Muccio, remarked that “[t]his is evidence of the strong pressure which developments have brought on Korean thinking; such a concept would have been impossible several months ago and would undoubtedly have been yelled down in the Assembly.”<sup>121</sup> To harken back to earlier State Department criticisms of the Chiang-Quirino-Rhee proposals for a Pacific Pact, it appeared that the Korean War was leading a majority of the ROK’s legislative political power to discover a “common purpose”, even with a former archenemy like Japan.

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<sup>119</sup> Rhee’s statements are recounted in a report from the inspector of the U.S. Embassy in Korea. Letter from Taylor, Foreign Service Inspector, to Perce. 20 Feb 1950. Box 1, Folder “Pusan 1950”, Seoul Mission and Embassy Misc. Classified Records 1948-1955, RG 84.

<sup>120</sup> “Summary of the Proceedings of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, Twentieth Meeting, Tenth Regular Session.” 2 Feb 1951, Box 4304, Central Decimal Files 1950-1954, RG 59.

<sup>121</sup> Muccio’s commentary comes from his cover summaries of enclosed files of National Assembly proceedings. “Transmitting Summaries of Proceedings of the National Assembly, January 22, 1951 – February 3, 1951.” 8 Feb 1951, Box 4304, CDF 1950-1954, RG 59.

The State Department did not facilitate or support the renewed Korean interest in rapprochement with Japan. On at least one occasion, American authorities in Japan refused to grant entry visas to Korean assemblymen who intended to visit Japan on a diplomatic mission, rebuffing this attempt at Korean-Japanese diplomacy.<sup>122</sup> By July 1951, the extent to which Dulles and State Department officials in Washington had excluded Korean interests motivated Ambassador Muccio to pen a sternly-worded complaint back home about his own country's conduct. "Korea supposedly [a] liberated nation and Japan the ex-enemy; it is in US interest to attain stability [between] both countries. Yet I note [that the] most difficult problems affecting relations [between] Japan and the ROK are being shelved as far as the treaty is concerned..." Muccio, in the interest of ROK-Japanese relations, argued that the signing of the peace treaty should even be delayed to allow time for a bilateral treaty between Korea and Japan to be signed concurrently.<sup>123</sup> Obviously, Muccio's telegram made little headway in the department, but it is an indication of how much American diplomats themselves felt frustrated with State Department policy that dismissed the need to promote ROK-Japanese relations.

Geopolitics synergized with American cultural attitudes as well as pessimistic perceptions of the Rhee regime, producing a clear preference to avoid involving Korea in a would-be Pacific Pact. American beliefs of Korean incompetence in the political sphere did not improve when Rhee's military collapsed early in the war and then became subordinate to an American-led command. The deep criticisms of many in the State Department towards the ROK is expressed well in a November 1950 memorandum penned by the American vice consul for the

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<sup>122</sup> "Summary of the Proceedings of the National Assembly, Twenty-sixth Meeting, Tenth Regular Session." 16 Feb 1951, Box 4304, CDF 1950-1954, RG 59.

<sup>123</sup> "Telegram from Pusan to the Secretary of State." 4 July 1951, Reel 18. Microform C43, Files of John Foster Dulles, RG 59.

U.S. Embassy in Korea: “The government which Koreans feel we [Americans] sponsor is at an all-time low in popularity with its own people and does not appear able to exercise effective and accepted leadership in solving the staggering problems of unification and rehabilitation unless important changes and reforms are effected.”<sup>124</sup> In the American view, Rhee’s government was unreliable, ineffective, and an encumbrance.

While concerns about the ROK’s international legitimacy momentarily gave reason for Dulles’ team to seek Korean participation in the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the motivations for a security pact were tilted towards generating practical, military advantage. In other words, it was easier for Dulles’ team to exclude Korea from discussions of military pacts rather than the treaty, because the concept of a mutual defense agreement was vulnerable to domination by a realist, balance-of-power mindsets and since Korean officials could not claim a “moral” right to be included in a defense agreement. The ROK’s sacrifices in the war against the communist threat in Asia was not enough to foster feelings of solidarity from Dulles’ team, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or relevant policy-movers in the State Department. All of this engendered an environment where American planners continued to maintain their distance, all the while negotiating treaties and pacts that drew their borders outside of Korea.

It was in that vein that Dulles’ team never seriously considered a Pacific Pact that would have included one of its most vocal, early supporters. The American intervention was not out of any specific interest in Korean concerns, but as an element of the broader effort to combat communism and make a demonstration on a global scale that the United States would stand by noncommunist states in the Asia-Pacific. This framing of intervention in Korea, American pessimism about the ROK’s vulnerable strategic position, and the belief that Korean concerns

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<sup>124</sup> “A Memorandum Concerning United States Political Objectives in Korea.” 30 Nov 1950, Box 1, Seoul Mission and Embassy Misc. Classifieds, RG 84.

obstructed true American goals in Asia, all resulted in Korean exclusion from the discussions of a multilateral alliance. Korea itself had few rhetorical resources to call upon to argue for its inclusion in a pact beyond vociferously aligning itself with the cause of anti-communism.

The Pacific Pact idea itself had fallen apart by early April 1951. On April 17, Acheson announced a reversal of American policy in a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia, noting that Dulles now intended to negotiate a series of bilateral agreements with interested parties. It cites several reasons, including earlier logic that a multilateral arrangement could be damaging for relations between the U.S. and nations that fell outside of the alliance. The language of the telegram, however, also points to other assumptions that underpinned American decision-making. “[A] series of agreements will provide basis of evolutionary development of larger regional arrangement, if such an arrangement has *any basis in reality*.” Additionally, “[The] new approach...has the additional advantage of avoiding [the] position of being merely the first among equals.”<sup>125</sup>

Despite the fact that the plans for a Pacific Pact in 1950-51 emanated from the State Department, the same objections that Acheson had towards the Rhee-Chiang-Quirino pact proposals remained. The statement that a larger regional collective might have no “basis in reality” recalls previous American conclusions that potential Asian participants were only really interested in obtaining a tangible form of American commitment, rather than any stake in strengthening bonds between them. Finally, the United States sought to retain its flexibility, even as it became involved with events on the far edge of its periphery in East Asia. The U.S. had outsized responsibilities and subsequently saw itself as the heavyweight in a relationship. Like

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<sup>125</sup> “Telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta,” 17 April 1951. Box 31, Folder “Pacific Pact 1949-1950”, Files Relating to U.S. Participation in SEATO, RG 59.

the bilateral tendencies in the negotiation of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the U.S. favored dyadic relations where it could maximize its influence against a smaller power.

### III. Conclusion

To reassure Pacific countries about a “rehabilitated” Japan, the U.S. was willing to float the idea of a broader collective alliance, with both economic and military aid flowing from Washington to its Asian partners. There is no evidence that earlier American pronouncements about the absence of Asian collective spirit was anything more than a convenient rhetorical phrase at the time. In doing so, however, the State Department delineated an alliance in the Asia-Pacific as an Asian idea, promoted by Asian advocates for Asian needs. The Pacific Ocean, for the State and Defense Department, was a frontier dividing the U.S. from Asia rather than a common denominator with its own centripetal force. If and when the U.S. found itself interested in exerting a leadership role in Asia, it would do so solely on its own terms rather than in pursuit of a broader multilateral idea. While Rooseveltian ideas still had weight in the negotiation of the peace treaty—with all its ideological connections to equality between nations, rehabilitation, and peace in the world—calculations of geopolitical security never allowed any such space in the negotiation of a defense arrangement for the region.

With the start of the Korean War and the crystallization of American grand strategic commitments in the Asia-Pacific through the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the U.S. in turn coopted the Pacific Pact idea. But under American direction, the pact was little more than a means to an end—the end being American domination of Japan’s strategic capacity and



reassurances that the U.S. would be ready in the unlikely event that Japan had imperialist ambitions in the future.

With little consideration given to the mechanics of a collective organization and with no interest in developing broader security ties between Asian nations, it was inevitable that the Pacific Pact proposals would be shelved during the treaty negotiations and replaced with far simpler and preferable bilateral agreements with key nations in the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. government's ironclad requirements that it maintain a distance from risky endeavors and make room for ambiguity, subsequently, ensured that a multilateral alliance was fundamentally ill-suited for American preferences. In the context of American ignorance of Asian, especially Korean, concerns stemming from their experiences in the war in the Pacific, Japanese rehabilitation and reinstatement as a sovereign state had to occur within the carefully-controlled confines of American bilateralist negotiating methods. For American diplomats, introducing other elements, like addressing issues in Korean-Japanese relations, would have caused unnecessary delays. With the conclusion of a peace treaty and bilateral agreements in Asia, the United States had decided its path in Asia, even as the final cinders of America's multilateralist moment had turned to ash.

## Epilogue

A remarkable document included in the files of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in the National Archives is a letter to John Foster Dulles from an individual named Kozo Abe, a professor based in Tokyo and the spokesman for an informal group of Japanese intellectuals. Mailed from Tokyo six days before the conference, it is unknown if Dulles ever read it, although its inclusion in the archives meant that his secretary certainly received it. The letter stated the group's opposition to Japanese rearmament, asking that Dulles instead support the cause of permanent peace in the world. It decried the absence of reparations in the peace treaty draft, claiming that it disregarded the interests of Asian peoples seeking to rebuild an Asia "destroyed by the Japanese army and navy." Abe acknowledged how little he could hope to influence the conference proceedings, but nevertheless pleaded that the peace treaty and its accompanying security treaty "may isolate Japan from all other Oriental peoples, present a great threat against the peace of the world, and endanger the real independence of Japan."<sup>126</sup>

Abe's misgivings about the peace treaty stem from how the United States positioned Japan within the American defense structure in Asia. By itself, we cannot take Kozo's letter as representative of either the Japanese public, or even the intellectual class. However, it does demonstrate that some observers even within Japan believed that the American diplomats behind the peace treaty were not taking broader Asian grievances into account. By speeding up the process of the return of Japanese sovereignty and ignoring residual wartime resentment, Japan

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<sup>126</sup> Letter from Kozo Abe to the 'Chairman of the San Francisco Peace Conference', 3 Sept 1951, Box 3, Folder "Letters Sent to Conference", Files Relating to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, RG 59.

faced a future of isolation. But Abe's feared-Japanese isolation was itself the result of a broader diplomatic mechanism at work, where the peace treaty served as an instrument that would bring the Cold War to Japan and, in doing so, remove American involvement from the process of Japanese reconciliation with World War II. Despite American dominance of politics in Northeast Asia at the time, it would be up to future generations of Korean and Japanese political leaders to restore normalized relations.

American exclusion of Korea from the peace treaty and the would-be Pacific Pact may have isolated Korea, but it also isolated Japan. No multilateral framework was in place to share the burden of reestablishing ties between Japan and its Asian nations. Nor was the arena set to promote intra-Asian cooperation. The peace treaty represented a key moment when the United States firmly chose to avoid handling intricate, morally-difficult, wartime questions. This choice was not merely the result of *realpolitik* mindsets or at the urging of any one individual, but rather an institutional outcome that derived from decades of America marginalizing Korea and having few concrete plans to uphold the lofty multilateralist rhetoric that the State Department had espoused during World War II.

The Rooseveltian idea of sovereign nations equal to one another despite differing levels of capacity was firmly substituted with the reality that America now saw the world through a Cold War lens. Putting a *de jure* end to the war with Japan was vital in pursuit of implementing a new Cold War strategy, and not as an objective in and of itself. To the rejoicing of some, like the group of Japanese businessmen who visited Nebraska in early 1952 and lauded the treaty for not being that of a "conqueror's", and to the dismay of others, like Kozo Abe, the United States was eager to pronounce Japan "rehabilitated" and ready to bear the responsibility of the anti-communist crusade. There had occurred a premature end to a conversation of how to address the

history of Japanese colonialism, and how Japan should interact with countries that it had formerly controlled.

U.S. reception of and later proposals for a Pacific Pact, a would-be NATO in Asia, demonstrated the extent to which the framing of issues in national security terms could obliterate multilateral idealism. Although the United Nations had intervened in the Korean War ostensibly on behalf of the ROK, Korea—despite all of its interests, concerns, and claims of moral redress—merely served as a symbol of American commitment to anti-communism in Asia. The State Department actively ignored Korean issues and concerns whenever such matters impeded the grand strategic timeframe. Korea transformed from a colonial state to a partner of the U.S., dependent solely on American interest in a bilateral relationship to survive. Cultural attitudes may not have been the primary decider of American grand strategic actions, but they lent credence to the same conclusions American diplomats reached through myopic Cold War mindsets. American ignorance of Korean concerns gave all the more reason to sideline those issues during the treaty and pact negotiations. Giving the ROK a voice, as Dulles might have described it, would have opened a Pandora's Box of unaddressed issues that would unacceptably delay the advancement of American grand strategy.

When there was a historic moment for the United States to engineer ROK-Japanese reconciliation, American officials balked. As the image of Communism rolling across Asia burned itself in their minds, resolving the bitter legacy of Japanese control of Korea was a low priority. The requirements of the Cold War, mixed with an inadequate American appreciation for what constituted a valid World War II experience in the Asia-Pacific, culminated in the decision to exclude the Republic of Korea from the San Francisco Peace Treaty.

In the nearly seventy years since the peace treaty, South Korea and Japan have both remained as central figures in American strategy in Asia. A deployment in Korea or Japan is common for American military personnel. American foreign affairs are intertwined with Japan and South Korean policies, due to persisting security concerns in the region. Japan and South Korea put together played host to a whopping thirty percent of American military personnel deployed overseas in 2017. Despite the closeness of both countries to the United States, charged issues stemming from Japan's history of involvement in Korea and perceptions of historical revisionism have plagued the efforts of some American planners to build a trilateral alliance between the three. Colonial and wartime legacies have not disappeared with time, but instead have festered and mutated despite some attempts to resolve the animosity.<sup>127</sup>

American actions in 1950-51 represent a missed chance, as American diplomats chose to follow the expedient course of action, sharply curtailing the extent of high-minded visions for a postwar Asia. The U.S. had set the foundations for its grand strategy and discovered a concrete base from which it could respond to the uncertainty, chaos, and contingency of events in the Asia-Pacific. But Pandora's Box could not be kept closed forever, and the casualties of U.S. grand strategy in East Asia have continued to haunt the present day.

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<sup>127</sup> South Korea and Japan reached an agreement in 1965 to normalize relations, which included Japanese "reparations" in the form of soft loans and economic aid. The ROK was then under the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, who used Japanese reparations to promote his country's development. This has complicated questions of reparations and redress for specific Korean victims who were not individually compensated and feel that Japan's government has remained unrepentant of the past.

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