
THE U.S. AND THE 1945 DIVISION OF KOREA: MISMANAGING THE 'BIG DECISIONS'

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The dividing line between the two Koreas was considered a temporary military expediency 67 years ago. It never disappeared, even after reshaped by battle after the Korean War. This 1945 division of Korea reflects little United States forethought about Korea's strategic position and low regard for the Korean people's ability to self-govern as an independent nation. America's designation of occupation zones in Korea was poorly handled, with enormous consequences for the Korean people. It arguably was part of a legacy of mismanaging a series of "big decisions" affecting Korea that continue to this day. The lesson of history for the U.S. is to be better informed and prepared to fulfill its responsibility toward the Korean peninsula; as a signatory to the Armistice it must be a participant in a permanent peace agreement.

The Korean Peninsula was divided at the 38th parallel in August 1945. Once the guns fell silent in the Korean War with the July 1953 Armistice, the military demarcation line (MDL) in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) roughly hewed to the 38th parallel. The 1945 division of Korea, considered a temporary military expediency to denote a line above and below which Soviet and American forces were to accept the surrender of Japanese troops, was portentous. The dividing line remains 67 years later, even after having been reshaped by battle. No one could have dreamed in 1945 that a temporary American designation of surrender zones would become permanent, now a relic of both World War II and the Cold War.

It is understood that, had the United States not proposed a division of Korea, Soviet forces would eventually have occupied the entire peninsula, and Korea would have become a Soviet satellite and base to threaten the security of Japan. This paper, however, argues that the division of Korea reflected little forethought by the United States about Korea's strategic position and low regard for the Korean people's ability to self-govern if it became an independent nation. The American designation of occupation zones in Korea was poorly handled, with enormous consequences for Korea's people. It arguably was part of a legacy of the U.S. mismanaging a series of "big decisions" affecting Korea that continues to this day.¹

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As Allied victory gradually became more certain during World War II, the plight of Korea slowly came to be addressed by the West. By 1943, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration advocated international trusteeship for postwar Korea to protect the interests of the nations directly concerned with the peninsula and to forestall potential conflict. It was thought a neutral Korea would best serve peace and stability in Asia and require Soviet-Chinese consent.² At the Cairo Conference in December 1943, the U.S., United Kingdom, and China proclaimed:

The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that *in due course* [emphasis added] Korea shall become free and independent.³

Britain had opposed mention of Korea at all, preferring to use it as a potential bargaining chip, and the American draft had stated "at the proper moment after the downfall of Japan, [Korea] shall become a free and independent country."⁴ The compromise draft suggested by the British included the phrase "in due course," which later angered Korean exiles who wanted immediate independence and wished to avoid Chinese tutelage. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin gave his approval to the Cairo communiqué on the Far East at the Tehran conference.

A general outlook prevailed among the Allies that 35 years of Japanese colonialism outweighed Korea's long history of independent self-government. A State Department expert on the Far East wrote as early as February

1942 that, for at least a generation, Koreans would have to be guided by the great powers, and Roosevelt himself claimed (apparently incorrectly) that Stalin envisioned a 40-year tutelage.⁵ By 1944, the State Department began formulating concrete plans for Korea's occupation and administration. That summer, the Roosevelt administration became convinced that Soviet participation in the Pacific theater would make Japan's defeat far easier; but Stalin would not enter the war in Asia until victory in Europe was achieved.⁶ In early 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) even recommended Soviet occupation of the entire Korean peninsula to prevent Japanese reinforcement of the home islands prior to the expected American invasion; Roosevelt was noncommittal on that proposal but maintained his endorsement of Soviet participation in the Pacific at the earliest possible time.⁷ He strove to avoid arousing Soviet suspicion of American intentions.

At the fateful Yalta conference of February 1945, Roosevelt proposed to Stalin a three-power trusteeship of Korea: the U.S., China and the USSR, but excluding Britain. However, Stalin chose to include Britain, as Roosevelt had been advised by Korean experts at the State Department; yet, against their advice, the president did not negotiate a detailed agreement.⁸ Overall, Stalin was offered concessions which acknowledged his preeminence in Northeast Asia in return for his eventual entry into the Pacific war: among them, recognition of Russia's pre-1905 rights in Manchuria, strongly suggesting the possible assertion of Russian interest in the future of Korea.⁹ Stalin apparently believed trusteeship would not prevent Moscow from having decisive influence over postwar Korea.¹⁰

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THE DECISION TO DIVIDE KOREA

Most scholars assert that Roosevelt was more concerned with maintaining the Soviet-American alliance than in keeping the Soviets out of Korea; perhaps Roosevelt was even ready to concede Korea as a Russian buffer state. Also, Roosevelt received no Soviet commitment to eventual Korean independence. Others insist that Roosevelt masterfully dealt with the problems

with political realism; his two-fold concern was not only to win the war but win the peace. Roosevelt, in this view, deftly avoided once again making Korea the victim of great power rivalry by attempting to fashion a new balance of power in East Asia. In any case, Washington in the late months of the war did not consider Korea ready for self-government. Washington also did not hold a high opinion of the Korean exile movement, which violently opposed trusteeship and was bitterly divided internally.

A third school makes plain the practical reality that at Yalta, final military positions regarding the Far East were indeterminate. Concrete policy on Korea's future simply could not be made. There had been little planning because most American military planners expected the war against Japan to continue for a few more years.¹¹ Until the manner and outcome of Japan's defeat was clear, precise planning was impossible. Planning

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regarding Korea's future indeed was already thin, and the American opinion of Korea's incapacity for post-liberation self-governance made clear planning all the more difficult.

However, Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe after Yalta caused fears of expanding sovietization and began to undermine American confidence in a Korean trusteeship. American intel-

ligence sources at that time indicated that over 100,000 Soviet-trained Korean guerrillas were ready for the liberation of Korea. Yet, the persistent factionalism within the Korean exile movement left Washington unable to find a capable and popular exile movement to support. Thus, trusteeship remained official U.S. policy, although some senior officials voiced their doubts in cabinet meetings.¹² As part of this policy, Korea was refused representation at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco (April-June 1945).

Meanwhile, by early spring 1945, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) had completed a series of papers on the Allied occupation of Korea, including the utilization of Koreans and Japanese in the military government and the relationship between the temporary military administration and a future international supervisory authority.¹³

At the time of his death in April 1945, Roosevelt was still optimistic about Soviet-American cooperation despite sharp differences over Poland. His successor, Harry Truman, was far more suspicious of Soviet intentions. Within a week of assuming office, he reversed Roosevelt's position on trusteeship and began to search for an alternative in Korea that could prevent Soviet expansion. Indeed, as historian James Matray put it, "Korea's fate ultimately was tied to American military capabilities and Truman's strategy for the defeat of Japan. If Stalin refused to endorse a Korean trusteeship, only prior American occupation of the peninsula could guarantee independence for Korea."¹⁴

General Douglas MacArthur, Allied commander in the Pacific theater, urged an early frontal assault on Japan once the Soviets had entered the war and he is said to have acquiesced to inevitable Soviet domination of Manchuria and Korea. However, other Truman advisors worried that once the Soviets entered the war, not only Manchuria and Korea would come under Moscow, but eventually China and Japan as well. Truman was urged to soon meet with Stalin and British prime minister Winston Churchill to prevent an Allied split, and Korean trusteeship was considered an issue urgently in need of clarification. Meanwhile, Truman rejected State Department recommendations to withhold the Yalta concessions until Stalin promised to respect the sovereignty of China and Korea and favored MacArthur's plan.

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American military leaders continued to lobby for direct invasion of Japan and for Soviet entry as the best method to defeat Japan. They rejected a proposal to deploy forces in Manchuria and Korea as unjustified. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall argued for Soviet military movement into Manchuria and Korea in order to accept the surrender of Japanese forces.

As Truman prepared for the Potsdam meeting that began July 17, 1945, final briefing papers urged that Korea not be invaded by only one of

the Allies. Upon his arrival there, Truman received news of the successful testing of the atomic bomb in New Mexico. The possibility now loomed of early Japanese surrender as well as averting Soviet entry into the war. Yet, no firm agreement on Korea could be reached because the trusteeship question became entangled with unrelated issues or simply was avoided.¹⁵

During the conference, General Marshall told his Soviet counterpart, General Alexei Antonov, that the U.S. did not contemplate a landing in Korea but would concentrate on landings in the Japanese main islands. However, he did caution the Russians that it would be politically inadvisable for either party to invade Korea alone. Nothing was agreed to on the multinational occupation of Korea, but the Soviets were forewarned that Korea was a lower priority for American military planners. Moreover, a Marshall aide, General John E. Hull, suggested to the Soviets that the 38th parallel would be a suitable boundary between Russian and American land forces when they did enter Korea, but the question was not discussed.¹⁶

Truman became hopeful that with the atomic bomb deployable in less than two weeks, victory over Japan would no longer require Soviet participation. Aware that the Soviets already were massing forces on the Chinese and Korean borders, Marshall knew the United States could not physically prevent the introduction of Soviet forces into Korea; he believed the U.S. should gain control of at least two ports. With his staff, Marshall settled upon the 38th parallel as a minimum policy objective, while still hoping that Japan's quick surrender would obviate Soviet entry.¹⁷ The subject of trusteeship may have been deliberately avoided at Potsdam, presumably in the hope that it would become unnecessary if Soviet entry were forestalled. In the final protocol, despite Soviet urgings, no definite agreement on Korea was reached. The Allied commitment at Cairo in 1943 was simply reaffirmed in the Potsdam Declaration.¹⁸

THE JAPANESE SURRENDER AND SOVIET ENTRY INTO KOREA

In the absence of a response from Japan to its July 28 ultimatum to surrender, the United States dropped history's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6. Japan still did not surrender, and a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9. The day before, exactly three months from

victory in Europe as they had promised at Yalta, the Soviets declared war on Japan. The Soviet intervention was unexpected by U.S. planners, many believing it would occur after mid-August, if at all; yet in view of the Soviet promise of entry by that date and the earnest Allied efforts to obtain their participation, it should have been anticipated. The overwhelmed and under-equipped Japanese troops, in general, were easily defeated. The Japanese command itself had militarily divided Korea, with the northern sector under the Kwantung Army and the southern sector under the Chosun Army. The Kwantung Army was the Soviet responsibility to defeat and in that sense, it was necessary for it to invade Korea.¹⁹ Thus, about 250,000 seasoned and well-equipped Soviet troops, including 35,000 Soviet-Koreans, moved into northeastern Korea from Vladivostok, occupying the northernmost cities by August 10.²⁰

Truman and his advisers, Harry Hopkins and W. Averill Harriman, were keenly aware that had the explicit subject of Soviet occupation of a portion of Korea been discussed with Stalin, he would have also insisted on a Soviet occupation zone in the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido and perhaps even in Manchuria.²¹ Soon after the Japanese surrender, the U.S. rebuffed all Soviet requests for such a zone in Hokkaido; yet in the case of Korea, no similar American effort was made to advise the Soviets to stay out. Historian Robert T. Oliver discussed some missed opportunities that could have avoided peninsular division:

The Japanese command itself had militarily divided Korea, with the northern sector under the Kwantung Army and the southern sector under the Chosun Army.

The United States realistically might have prevented it by recognition... of the Republic-of-Korea-in-Exile. It might have given lend-lease funds and support to utilize the strongly anti-Japanese population of the vital Korean peninsula to cut the supply line for the Japanese forces in China and to establish a base for an attack on Japan itself.²²

THE DIVISION OF KOREA UPON JAPAN'S IMMINENT SURRENDER

As Japan asked for surrender terms on August 10, Washington made one final attempt to prevent unilateral Soviet occupation of Korea. Secretary of State James Byrnes instructed the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC, sometimes also abbreviated SWINK) to construct a plan for the joint Soviet-American occupation of Korea, with the line as far north as possible. Late that night of August 10, Brig. Gen. George Lincoln, the Army's advisor to the SWNCC, "took a guess at how far the Soviets could get, and he decided on the thirty-eighth parallel, although he was not convinced the Soviets would respect any line.... Soon afterwards, he apparently had misgivings. He thought perhaps it should have been the fortieth parallel, if there was any chance the Soviets would respect it. Lincoln then apparently started pondering if he had made a mistake."²³ He decided to call in Col. Charles H. Bonesteel (later to command U.N. forces in Korea) and Col. Dean Rusk (later to become Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson), assigned to the Strategy and Policy Group of the Operations Division of the War Department, and gave them thirty minutes to come up with something better. What Bonesteel and Rusk kept in mind was that the nearest American troops were 600 miles away in Okinawa, while the Soviets had already entered northern Korea.



*Brigadier General
George A. Lincoln*

The issue for them was how to quickly create a surrender arrangement which the Soviets would accept while preventing their seizure of all Korea. Bonesteel wanted to draw the division around provincial boundaries so that the Japanese would clearly understand the demarcation. The only map of Korea available to them was a 1942 *National Geographic* map of "Asia and Adjacent Areas," which did not denote provinces, only latitude and longitude. Rusk later confided that they had seriously considered drawing the line between Pyongyang and Wonsan, at the narrowest waist of Korea around 39 degrees latitude, but their map's limitations precluded doing so with accuracy.²⁴ Instead, they chose the 38th parallel. Moreover, the two



The Korean peninsula by late 1948, prior to the 1950-53 Korean War

colonels believed the division line was further north than they thought could realistically be reached by U.S. forces if the Soviets disagreed, but felt it vital to include Korea's capital, Seoul, as well as several Japanese prisoner of war camps.

Rusk himself described the deliberations:

...[T]he State and War Departments differed over where and when American forces should accept [Japan's] surrender. The State Department wanted us to accept the surrender as far north on the mainland of China as possible, including key points in Manchuria. But the U.S. Army...did not want responsibility for areas where it had no or few forces. In fact, the Army did not want to go onto the mainland at all.

...During a [SWNCC] meeting on August 14, 1945,²⁵ Colonel Charles Bonesteel and I retired to an adjacent room late at night and studied intently a map of the Korean peninsula. Working in haste and under

great pressure, we had a formidable task: to pick a zone for the American occupation. . . . [I]t seemed to us that Seoul, the capital, should be in the American sector. We also knew that the U.S. Army opposed an extensive area of occupation. Using a *National Geographic* map, we looked just north of Seoul for a convenient dividing line but could not find a natural geographic line. We saw instead the 38th parallel and decided to recommend that. . . .

[SWNCC] accepted it without too much haggling, and surprisingly, so did the Soviets. No one present at our meeting, including two young American colonels, was aware that at the turn of the century the Russians and Japanese had discussed spheres of influence in Korea, divided along the thirty-eighth parallel. *Had we known that* [emphasis added] we almost surely would have chosen another line of demarcation. Remembering those earlier discussions, the Russians might have interpreted our action as acknowledgement of their sphere of influence in Korea north of the thirty-eighth parallel. Any future talk about the agreed-upon reunification of Korea would be seen as mere show. But we were ignorant of all this, and [SWNCC's] choice of the thirty-eighth parallel, recommended by two tired colonels working late at night, proved fateful.²⁶

Bonesteel and Rusk's draft plan was reviewed after midnight by their superiors. One admiral, M. B. Gardner, proposed revising the draft to move the demarcation to the 39th parallel, which would have included the strategic Chinese port of Dalian as well as most of Korea. Gardner's views were in line with the advice of Navy Secretary James Forrestal and Ambassador Harriman. But General Lincoln, the colonels' boss, contended that the Soviets would not accept such a line nor could the U.S. reasonably hope to reach points further north. Assistant Secretary of State James Dunn, chairman of SWNCC, supported Lincoln and considered this to be the view of Secretary of State James F. Byrnes. Thus the draft was sent to the full SWNCC, which on August 13 accepted the proposed division of Korea; then it was formally presented by Dunn to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for review. On August 14, the plan was signed by President Truman and communicated to General MacArthur the next day. As part of General Order Number One, it stated:



Gen. Charles H. Bonesteel III and Secretary of State Dean Rusk

The senior Japanese commanders and all ground, sea, air and auxiliary forces within Manchuria, Korea north of 38 degrees north latitude and Karafuto [Sakhalin] shall surrender to the Commander-in-Chief of Soviet forces in the Far East. The Imperial General Headquarters, its senior commanders, and all ground, sea, air and auxiliary forces in the main islands of Japan, minor islands adjacent thereto, Korea south of 38 degrees north latitude, and the Philippines shall surrender to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Forces in the Pacific.²⁷

The plan was telegraphed to Stalin, who accepted it without question on August 16, although the JCS were anticipating rejection and prepared to order the immediate occupation of Busan as a minimal U.S. objective.²⁸ However, Stalin's reply requested permission to accept the Japanese surrender on Hokkaido as well, below Sakhalin Island (the southern half of which was to be returned to Russia).

The Soviets, absent a stern American warning not to enter Korea were generally deemed capable of occupying the entire peninsula before any American troops could get there. Only Stalin's willingness, it is generally thought, to accept the surrender arrangement made possible the American occupation of southern Korea. However, according to military historian Michael Sandusky, U.S. military planners had an exaggerated view of Soviet capabilities. He argues that the on-the-ground situation on August 15, 1945 in Korea and Manchuria was vastly different from what Washington

perceived. Sandusky asserts the Soviets could have been stopped at a line much further north, possibly even at the 40th parallel. He writes:

In Korea, the meager Soviet forces were brought to a standstill in Chongjin [about 45 miles south of the Soviet border with Korea]. Few Soviet troops were in Korea and the ones that were there were pinned down by resolute Japanese troops....[T]he Soviets were in no position to expand their presence in Korea....In Korea, Soviet forces were still well above the forty-first parallel [above Kimchaek on the eastern coast].²⁹

Sandusky argues that, given the naval and air transport capabilities the U.S. had at its disposal, key areas of Korea as far north as Hamhung (below the 40th parallel) could have been secured by U.S. forces had these areas been accorded the appropriate priority. At that point, the U.S. had an ability to move troops superior to the Soviets; in order to reach Pyongyang on August 24, the Russians even had to airlift troops. Yet, prior to surrender, General MacArthur insisted on a sequential occupation of areas held by Japanese troops: no U.S. troops were to occupy Korea until he had enforced the main surrender in Tokyo Bay. Japan had preeminent priority. As a result, Sandusky says, "...MacArthur got what he wanted: a fleeting moment's



*General Douglas MacArthur accepting the formal
surrender of Japan, September 2, 1945*

glory in Tokyo Bay on 2 September [1945, at Japan's formal surrender],” but President Truman was left with a very awkward occupation of Korea, divided between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Although the unexpectedly premature Soviet entry into the Pacific theater thwarted Truman's hope to exclude the Soviets from Korea and its reconstruction, he thought he had registered a great success by obtaining Stalin's concession on this arrangement. Stalin's motivation apparently was to maintain Allied harmony so as not to arouse too much reaction to the sovietization of Eastern Europe; he also feared U.S. military power. He hoped to partake or have equal voice in the Japanese occupation, and was confident that trusteeship could lead to a pro-Soviet or “friendly” Korea. An American attempt to unilaterally seize Korea would have been gravely detrimental to overall Soviet interests. When, by late August, Harriman communicated to Stalin Truman's refusal to allow any Soviet occupation of Japan, Stalin acceded. Stalin chose to respect the Korean arrangement despite Truman's rebuff on Japan, and he instructed the Red Army to remain north of the 38th parallel; however, this portended that resolution of the Korean situation would become far more difficult, despite Truman's outward optimism.³⁰

On September 7, MacArthur issued a proclamation to the people of Korea in which he declared the territory south of 38 degrees north latitude and its people to be under his military authority as Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Forces, Pacific. He assured the Korean people that “*in due course* [emphasis added] Korea shall become free and independent,” and that “the purpose of the Occupation is to enforce the Instrument of Surrender and to protect them in their personal and religious rights.”³¹ On September 18, Truman issued a statement concerning Korean liberation. He proclaimed that the “building of a great nation has now begun with the assistance of the United States, China, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, who are agreed that Korea shall become free and independent.”³²

PERSPECTIVES ON KOREA'S DIVISION

The division of Korea, however hasty and temporarily intended, is the seminal event of postwar Korean history. In his memoirs, Truman portrayed the decision to divide Korea at the 38th parallel as the consequence of military convenience and expediency in accepting the Japanese surrender.³³

Although, in immediate postwar years, a few suspected that the decision to divide Korea was made at Yalta or Potsdam, Truman's account is accepted by most scholars, with the understanding that U.S. options were limited by the political and strategic realities.

A more critical view blames the U.S. for a policy of drift and vacillation, of oversight and blunder. Gregory Henderson put it succinctly:

No division of a nation in the present world is so astonishing in its origin as the division of Korea; none is so unrelated to conditions of sentiment within the nation itself at the time the division was effected; none to this day so unexplained; in none does blunder and planning oversight appear to have played so large a role. Finally, there is no division for which the U.S. government bears so heavy a share of the responsibility as it bears for the division of Korea.³⁴

A more common criticism is offered by historian Charles M. Dobbs:

The confusions of wartime diplomacy would continue [in American policy toward Korea throughout the 1940s]; the hasty and sometimes incomplete decision-making process would reoccur. American officials would still find Korea of little strategic significance.... Of course, as the confusion continued, policymaking vacillated, and the situation would worsen or suddenly change. Similar to the hasty decision to occupy Korea at the 38th parallel without consideration of likely consequences, the internal situation of Korea, or the attitude of Soviet leaders, American officials would continue to merely react to the situation.... Throughout the 1940s, Korea would gain the attention of the harried men and women in Washington only when it seized the headlines.... In almost every case, policy would be made only for the short-term.... [T]he Soviets deserved the lion's share of the blame for the ensuing controversy; but the U.S. government also deserves criticism for its failure to gain control of the situation, to plan ahead, to be prepared to act when the moment called for action. American officials should have recognized that...the peninsula would demand not just idle musings but serious, step-by-step planning.³⁵

George McCune, in charge of the Korea Desk at the State Department in 1945, said, judging from the papers passing through his desk, that "almost no thought at all was given to Korea as a nation of more than 26

million persons.”³⁶ McCune wrote that the division of Korea into occupation zones was a decision made by military staffs without political considerations and was presented as a *fait accompli* to the State Department. His unhappiness with this decision later turned into a sense of despair and guilt over what he considered to be a huge failure of U.S. policy as he watched the 38th parallel turn into a permanent divide between the two Koreas.

America’s self-conception of its role and interests in Korea have not been consistent but have shifted and oscillated over the past seven decades. Historically, the U.S. has not handled well many of the “big decisions” affecting Korea. One major problem that became manifest in 1945 was an overall low U.S. estimation of the strategic priority and importance of Korea, along with the notion that once liberated, its people would be incapable of self-government for a lengthy period. There appears to have been insufficient wartime analysis devoted to Korea, compared to that for Japan, China or the Soviet Union.

The division of Korea can also be said to manifest this low assessment of Korea’s importance. Korea’s lower priority was clear in Truman’s adamant refusal to allow Stalin military jurisdiction over Japan’s Hokkaido island without being similarly adamant about Korea. If it was impossible to keep the Soviets out of Korea altogether because of their common border, the U.S. could have attempted to limit Soviet troops to the

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extreme northeastern part of the peninsula or at least to the 40th parallel, to the exclusion of Pyongyang and the major port cities of Wonsan and Nampo. Moreover, General Marshall’s admission to Soviet General Antonov at Potsdam that the U.S. had no plans to make a landing in Korea as part of an invasion of Japan appears to have given a green light to the Soviets to enter Korea, whatever Marshall may have actually intended in his remarks.

Over previous centuries the Korean peninsula had been the object of several designs by Japan, Russia, and China to divide its territory.³⁷ In contrast, the 1945 partition of Korea was intended by the United States to be

only a temporary division of the responsibilities for accepting the Japanese surrender and administering Korea until military occupation could end. It was not a design of conquest by a great power. Yet, Korea's division has endured for nearly seven decades, compounded by the Korean War, whose Armistice and MDL remain incontrovertible facts.

Korea analyst and historian Edward Olsen suggests the Allies' 1943 "in due course" commitment to Korea to become a whole and independent nation has been postponed indefinitely and remains unfulfilled. However, he acknowledges that the U.S. deserves credit for becoming more sophisticated over the years about Korean affairs, remaining committed to helping Korea, and exploring some innovative options. He wrote prescriptively for the policymaking community as to what the U.S. could achieve decades after Korea's initial division:

...[I]t is worthwhile to offer normative advice on how the United States can best improve its policy toward Korea. This is especially crucial given the United States' role in Korea's division, Korea's open-ended partition, and Korea's environment for reconciliation and reunification....

If the United States is ever to reach a national consensus about how to improve U.S. policy toward ending Korea's division through unification, the U.S. bureaucracy needs to develop the appropriate infrastructure to be exposed to the healthy debate over policy options and work with counterparts in both Koreas and other countries to generate a meaningful dialogue. The best way to do this would be for the U.S. government to work with American academic centers and think tanks with expertise on Korean studies to create a U.S. center or institute for Korean unification affairs that would amount to an institutional counterpart to the organizations that exist in South Korea and North Korea. Such an organization might be part of the U.S. government or it might be sanctioned by the U.S. government but established in a nongovernmental setting. This center/institute could regularly host conferences and workshops, publish analyses, and sponsor visiting Korean specialists in inter-Korean affairs—from both North Korea and South Korea—to participate in a broad range of activities. Creating such an organization and integrating its activities into a framework providing information to U.S. policy makers and their working-level advisors would be a very positive step.³⁸

Olsen made this proposal as early as 2002, but no steps have been taken by the U.S. to implement an official institute for Korean unification affairs in ten years.

CONCLUSION

The lesson of history for the United States is to be better informed and better prepared to fulfill its responsibility toward the Korean peninsula—one it cannot evade—as it is a signatory to the Armistice and must be a participant in a permanent peace agreement. The U.S. must not once again “drop the ball” on big decisions affecting Korea, as happened in 1945, 1950, and arguably at later points in time up to the present (e.g., the needless scrapping of the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework in 2003 or even the “strategic patience”—benign neglect—policy toward North Korea of the Obama administration).

Perhaps we are entering a time of new paradigms, not of resurgent old paradigms. Third generation North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the winner of December’s South Korean presidential election ought to embrace new paradigms to take advantage of the opportunities that are likely to be available for the two Koreas in 2013 and beyond. National reunification need not remain a distant dream, or involve a long, drawn-out process, if each side embraces a Korean-style “new thinking.” Rather than a zero-sum competition, each Korea will need to see the other as a partner for peace. If the United States can lead the facilitation of such a process of inter-Korean dialogue, cooperation and reintegration, the tragedy which the Korean people have suffered since 1945 can be finally resolved. It should be done in a manner in which no great power dictates or compels terms detrimental to the Korean people, so they may be united, free and independent, and able to play their unique role in Asia and the world.

Notes

1. The earliest period of American mismanagement occurred between its 1882 recognition of Korea and Japan's 1910 annexation. Many Koreans consider the 1905 Taft-Katsura Agreement evidence of American facilitation of Japan's control over Korea in exchange for a similar U.S. arrangement in the Philippines. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize for brokering the Treaty of Portsmouth, which acknowledged Japan's "paramount political, military and economical interests" in Korea. One historian concluded of U.S. complicity in Japan's annexation of Korea, "[T]he burden of guilt rests upon President [Theodore] Roosevelt and Secretary of State Elihu Root, for entering into a fraudulent arrangement with the Japanese Government to look the other way while ill-conceived, illegal and hastily constructed statements were prepared under the guise of a legal protocol or treaty, to effect a military and violent takeover of a sovereign state to whom the Senate had pledged its good faith and perpetual friendship in 1882." (cf. Shaw, Carole Cameron, *The Foreign Destruction of Korean Independence*, Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2007, p. 278.)

2. Matray, James Irving, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985, p. 19.

3. "Statement Released After the Cairo Conference by President Roosevelt, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and Prime Minister Churchill, December 1, 1943," in *The Record on Korean Reunification, 1943-60: Narrative Summary With Principal Documents*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, October 1960, p. 42.

4. Dobbs, Charles M., *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-50*, Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981, p. 13. The American draft was written by Roosevelt advisor, Harry Hopkins.

5. Matray, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 21.

6. Stalin committed to enter the Pacific war three months after victory in Europe was achieved. For an excellent international perspective of the final months of World War II in the Pacific, see Hasegawa, Tsuyoshi, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2005.

7. Matray, *ibid.*, p. 25.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.

9. Goodrich, Leland M., *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956, pp. 11-12.

10. Matray, *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

11. Dobbs, *ibid.*, p. 18.

12. Matray, *ibid.*, p. 30.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
15. Dobbs, *ibid.*, p. 25. Stalin and his foreign minister, Molotov, reportedly attempted to reach an understanding over Korea with Truman and Churchill, but the American and British sides would not engage in discussion.
16. Oliver, Robert T., *The History of the Korean People in Modern Times: 1800 to the Present*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993, p. 160.
17. Matray, *ibid.*, p. 42.
18. "The Potsdam Proclamation Defining Terms for the Surrender of Japan, July 26, 1945," in *The Record on Korean Reunification...*, *ibid.*, p. 43. The Soviets did not subscribe to the declaration until two weeks later.
19. Lee, Won Sul, *The United States and the Division of Korea*, 1945, Seoul: Kyunghee University Press, 1982, pp. 68-69.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
21. Henderson, Gregory, "Korea," in Gregory Henderson, Richard N. Lebow, and John G. Stoessinger, eds., *Divided Nations in a Divided World*, New York: D. McKay Co., 1974, p. 47.
22. Oliver, *ibid.*, p. 162.
23. Sandusky, Michael C., *America's Parallel*, Alexandria, VA: Old Dominion Press, 1983, p. 226.
24. Lee, Won Sul, *ibid.*, p. 84.
25. Rusk misspoke in his recollection. The actual date was August 10-11, 1945.
26. Rusk, Dean, *As I Saw It*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1990, pp. 123-24.
27. "General Order No. 1, Military and Naval," quoted in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, Vol. VI: British Commonwealth, the Far East*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969, p. 659. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
28. Matray, *ibid.*, p. 46.
29. Sandusky, p. 252.
30. Matray, pp. 46-47.
31. "Proclamation to the People of Korea Issued by General Douglas MacArthur, September 7, 1945," *The Record on Korean Unification...*, *ibid.*, p. 45. Contrast MacArthur's approach to Soviet General T. F. Shtykov's proclamation to

Koreans in the North: “You, the people of Korea! You have become a free nation. The military forces of the Soviet Union have provided all conditions for the people of Korea to start creative efforts freely.”

32. “Statement by President Truman Concerning the Liberation of Korea, September 18, 1945,” *The Record on Korean Unification...*, *ibid.*, p. 46. This message, largely written by Dean Acheson, then Undersecretary of State, was issued so that the administration could clarify why the American Military Government (AMG) in Korea was using Japanese personnel to augment its staff. The practice, although deemed necessary administratively in the absence of trained U.S. military government personnel, was reprehensible to the Koreans and quite damaging to U.S. prestige; by mid-October, most Japanese nationals had been removed from the south, but a few officials were retained until summer 1946.

33. Truman, Harry S., *Memoirs. Vol. 1: Year of Decisions*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955, p. 445.

34. Henderson, *ibid.*, p. 44.

35. Dobbs, *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

36. George M. McCune, “Korea: The First Year of Liberation,” *Pacific Affairs*, March 1947, p. 4.

37. Cf. Loh, Keie-Hyun, “Territorial Division of Korea: A Historical Survey,” *Korean Affairs*, April 1964.

38. Olsen, Edward A., *Korea: The Divided Nation*, Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2005, pp. 168-69.

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