

## **The General Who Loathed Surprise: Douglas MacArthur and Korea, 1950-1951**

Allan R. Millett

For General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, the conflict in Korea, 1950 - 1951 was the best of wars and the worst of wars. It allowed him the glory of the successful landing at Inchon and the rout of the North Korean army by early October, 1950. Then the war turned against the United Nations Command in December. MacArthur again fell victim to strategic surprise as he had in 1941 - 1942 to the Japanese. This time his adversary, the Chinese People's Liberation Army, accepting daunting operational limitations, surprised MacArthur and drove his allied army of South Koreans, Americans, and UN ground forces from seven other nations out of North Korea. For almost five months, MacArthur schemed to widen the war beyond Korea. He asserted that air and naval actions against the People's Republic of China would force the Chinese People's Volunteers Force (CPVF) from Korea and allow a second liberation and unification of Korea, the political objective of the United States as sanctioned by the United Nations since 1948. He did not succeed, much to his surprise.<sup>1</sup>

From the Japanese capitulation of September 1945 until the North Korean invasion of June, 1950, Douglas MacArthur paid scant attention to the American and Soviet occupation of a divided Korea and the development of two opposed revolutionary republics in Korea, 1948 - 1950. MacArthur focused on the rehabilitation and reform of Japan and, after 1948, the defense of Japan from Soviet invasion. Korea was not an official part of MacArthur's jurisdiction as Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP), his authority to govern Japan, or as Commander-in-Chief Far East, his responsibility for the American forces in and around the Home Islands. As a meeting in Moscow, December, 1945, the United States and the USSR agreed to a joint trusteeship until they could agree on one Korean government. Until its official independence in August, 1948, the Republic of Korea - that is, the American occupation zone - was administered by the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) with its military missions performed by the U.S. Army XXIV Corps and its successor, U.S. Army Forces in Korea (USAFIK), which left Korea by July, 1949.

Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, U.S. Army, served as MacArthur's counterpart in

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is drawn from the personal papers, correspondence, message traffic, organizational reports, and plans organized in Record Groups 6-10, the archives of the CINCFE/CINCUNC/SCAP, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, the MacArthur Library and Memorial, Norfolk, Virginia. MacArthur's papers are complemented by the Maj. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby Papers and the documents collected by Dr. D. Clayton James, author of the three-volume biography of MacArthur, *The Years of MacArthur* (Houghton Mifflin, 1985). MacArthur told history his way in *Reminiscences* (McGraw-Hill, 1964), which followed Courtney Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with Destiny* (Knopf, 1956). Edward M. Almond's papers are preserved in the U.S. Army Heritage and Educational Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The reviews of MacArthur's policy preferences and conduct of the war may be found in U.S. Congress, Senate, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, Committees on Armed Forces and Foreign Relations, Hearings: "Military Situation in the Far East," 5 vols., Government Printing Office, 1951, later published by Arno Press, 1979.

Korea. As a wartime division and corps commander, Hodge had not served in MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command, but had fought the Japanese as part of U.S. Army Pacific, the land force component of U.S. Pacific Command. Despite Hodge's exemplary war record, he had no special relationship with MacArthur. Like SCAP, Hodge received orders from various diplomatic and military committees on occupation policy, transmitted by the Secretary of War and, after 1947, by the Secretary of Defense as advised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The ultimate authority, of course, was the Commander-in-Chief, President Harry S. Truman. The real source of authority, however, was the groups of career diplomats with Asian expertise who advised Secretaries of State George C. Marshall and Dean Acheson.<sup>2</sup>

MacArthur's interest in Korea thus was unofficial and ebbed and flowed as influenced by Japanese political reform. MacArthur took a personal interest in the repatriation of Koreans from Japan and return of overseas Japanese from Manchuria and Korea, largely completed by January, 1946. He may have followed the struggle to unify and then divide Korea, but his role was that of an interested spectator. He visited Korea for one day, August 15, 1948, for Syngman Rhee's inauguration and the recognition of the Republic of Korea as a sovereign nation. MacArthur's brief remarks stressed the unfulfilled goal of a unified Korea and his hope that the Korean people would find a way to make the 38th Parallel irrelevant. In the meantime, he pledged "to defend Korea as I would California."<sup>3</sup>

Defending Korea, however, was not a FECOM priority, nor did it influence the JCS's war planning in 1948 - 1949 when the Soviet threat dominated American defense policy. Arbitrary budget guidelines reduced American military power to bomber-borne nuclear weapons. MacArthur's theater mission was to defend Japan from a Soviet invasion, assumed to be directed toward Hokkaido as the USSR's operations in 1945 implied. Only American air power (the Far East Air Forces) and naval power (Naval Forces Far East/Seventh Fleet) could deter or defeat such an attack. No American base in Korea could contribute to Japan's defense, or so reasoned the Joint Staff and MacArthur's Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group (JSPOG). MacArthur did not support the State Department's objection to withdrawing the last residual troops from Korea, the 5th Regimental Combat Team. State's Asian specialists in vain pointed out the deterrent value of the 5th RCT since it defended the direct approaches to Seoul at the Uijongbu Corridor. As the possibility of a North Korean attack increased in 1949 - 1950, based on many armed clashes along the 38th Parallel between Republic of Korean Army

---

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Military Governor, USAMGIK, "History of the United States Army Military Government in Korea, September 1945 - June 1946," 2 vols., USFK Historical Files, Dean Center, US Base Yongsan, ROK; Hdqs. Far East Command, "History of the Korean War: General Headquarters Support and Participation (23 June 1950 - 30 April 1951)," 1951, mss history with documents, USAH&EC; Steven L. Reardon, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense*, Vol. 1, *The Formative Years, 1947-1949* (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1984); Kenneth W. Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1947 - 1950* (Historical Division, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1979); Historical Office, Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948*, Vol. 6, *The Far East and Australia* (GPO, 1976). For an overview of American Foreign policy, see Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> SCAP remarks, August 15, 1948, "SCAP Sees Reunited Korea," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, August 16, 1945; program, "National Celebration," Seoul, ROK, August 15, 1948, all in Personal Correspondence, 1948, RG 10, MacArthur Papers.

(ROKA) and North Korean People's Army (NKPA) units, Far East Command drafted a plan to withdraw the Korean Military Advisory Group from Korea. JSPOG also drafted a study of the requirements of holding South Korea, which identified the defense of the port of Pusan by two American divisions with 5th Air Force tactical air support as the minimal commitment.<sup>4</sup>

Although General MacArthur monitored the insurgency that grew in South Korea throughout 1948, he took no official position on the possibility of American intervention in the case of a KPA invasion. The growing pessimism of the ROKA intelligence staff and KMAG intelligence groups in early 1950 did not move MacArthur to consult the JCS on any measures other than providing ammunition to the ROKA. The FECOM G-2, Maj. Gen. Charles A Willoughby, followed ROKA intelligence assessments through his Korean Liaison Office, a subunit of the G-2 staff stationed in Seoul. Reporting from the American diplomatic mission in Korea reached FECOM through MacArthur's political advisor, Ambassador William Sebald. FECOM also received intelligence reports from the surviving OSS/CIA network in Manchuria and China, as well as assessments from the Chinese Nationalist intelligence system, still active inside China. In addition, Willoughby received advice from veteran officers of the Imperial Japanese Army, who maintained sources in North Korean and Manchuria.<sup>5</sup>

In April-May 1950, Far East Command received intelligence reports and military weapons requests from the ROK government and KMAG that assumed the KPA would soon invade South Korea. The timing was uncertain, but the analysts assumed the KPA would wait for the summer rains (*changma*) to abate in August. Although MacArthur knew about the KPA's growing combined arms capability, his strategic gaze remained fixed on the defense of Formosa and the restoration of the Chinese Nationalist armed forces. He made no special appeals on behalf of the ROK armed forces or for his own four-division U.S. Eighth Army, deemed not prepared for combat by inspection teams sent from the Headquarters U.S. Army Field Forces, the office that evaluated combat readiness. As MacArthur testified to a Congressional joint committee in 1951, he received no warnings from Washington about an impending invasion or as to how he should respond. Neither of MacArthur's air and naval component commanders, Lt. Gen. George E. Stratemeyer of Far East Air Forces and Vice Adm. C. Turner Joy of U.S. Naval Forces Far East, foresaw any invasion. The only report that carried a sense of immediate danger was the June 15 semi-annual report of KMAG, which challenged the personal view of Brig. Gen. William L. Roberts, the chief of KMAG, who told MacArthur and JCS Chairman Omar N. Bradley in January in a meeting in Tokyo that the ROKA could fight well as light infantry and had shown skill and toughness in its border clashes with the KPA and in defeating Communist guerrillas in South Korea, 1948 - 1950. The KMAG report, however, gave the ROKA only a slight chance of defeating a Soviet-style KPA, well-armed with T-34 tanks and Red Army artillery. If MacArthur showed any surprise in the first weeks of the war, it was that

---

<sup>4</sup> CINCFE to JCS, August 17, 1948, RG 9, MacArthur Papers; Minutes, Joint Staff FECOM meetings August 1, 1949 - June 6, 1950, Korea Files, RG 9, MacArthur Papers; oral memoir (1971), Maj. Gen. E. K. Wright USA, G-3, FECOM, Clayton James Papers, MacArthur Library.

<sup>5</sup> The Willoughby papers include FECOM Daily Intelligence Briefs, 1947-1951; copies of CIA and Army Staff G-2 studies and assessments; a mss history, "A Brief History of MacArthur's Intelligence Service," 1951; Lt. Col. Leonard Abbott, USA, "Korean Liaison Office Report," 1950 with attached agent reports, Willoughby Papers.

the ROKA could not defend Seoul for more than four days.<sup>6</sup>

When he first learned of the North Korean attack in the late morning of Sunday, June 25 (Tokyo time), MacArthur waited about six hours before sending an official assessment, which arrived at 1 A.M., June 25 (Washington time). Having read two more reports from Ambassador to the ROK John J. Muccio, the military attaché, and KMAG's acting commander, MacArthur agreed with the Americans in Seoul that North Korea had launched an offensive at five different sites along the 39th Parallel with the clear intent of occupying all of South Korea. His assessment matched that of John Foster Dulles, the State Department's special envoy to FECOM to discuss the peace treaty with Japan. Dulles, in fact, recommended United States' intervention with United Nations approval in his first report to Washington, sent on the evening of June 25. The same evening MacArthur briefed William R. Matthews, a journalist traveling with Dulles and fresh from a four-day visit to South Korea. MacArthur called the North Korean attack "an act of international banditry, inexcusable, unprovoked aggression." He hoped the Truman administration would have the courage to aid South Korea. He had already ordered ammunition and supplies to be shipped to Pusan and alerted FEAF and NAVFORFE to be ready to aid the ROK armed forces. MacArthur hoped the first signs of American intervention would halt the invasion, but guessed the North Koreans would have to be destroyed on the battlefield by American forces.<sup>7</sup>

Much to Douglas MacArthur's surprise, the Truman administration honored his requests for operating authority and reinforcements. Creating the additional forces CINCFE requested took time. MacArthur marveled at the rapidity with which Washington authorized air and naval operations against the North Koreans and approved the deployment of the Eighth Army to Korea. Surprised at Truman's aggressiveness, MacArthur told another general: "I don't believe it!" To ensure Truman did not back away from his immediate bellicosity, MacArthur visited South Korea on June 29 and then reported that only American ground troops could stop

---

<sup>6</sup> Brig. Gen. W. L. Roberts, briefing for CJCS January 24, 1950, appended memo, "Visit of Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Far East," February, 1950, File 091 (Japan), Records of the JCS, RG 218; Brig. Gen. W. L. Roberts to Maj. Gen. C. L. Bolté, March 8, 1950, G-3 (Plans and Operations) File 091 (Korea), Records of the U.S. Army Staff, RG 319, NARA II; Chief KMAG to C/S. ROKA, June 1, 1950, KMAG Historical Files, 1950, RG 554, NARA II; Hdgs. KMAG, Semi-Annual Report, January 1 - June 15, 1950, KMAG Historical Files; Amb. John J. Muccio, "Military Aid to Korean Security Forces," June 9, 1950 reprinted in Dept. of State, *Bulletin*, June 26, 1950; Frank Gibney, "Progress Report," *Time*, June 13, 1950; CINCFE to AC/S G-3, memo, "Disposition, Strength and Combat Capabilities of Major Army Forces in Overseas Commands," May 30, 1950, General Files, 1950, Records of the Army Staff (G-3), RG 319; Hdgs. Army Field Forces, report, training inspection, Eighth Army, FECOM, September - October 1949, U.S. Army Field Force Command Records, RG 554; CINCFE, memorandum on Formosa, June 14, 1950, RG 9, MacArthur Papers; Hdgs., SCAP/FECOM, memo, "General Orientation for the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," Tokyo, June 18, 1950, Selected DOD Records, Truman Papers.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Amb. J. J. Muccio to Sec State, June 25, 1950, reprinted in Dept. of State Pub. No. 3922, "United States Policy in the Korean Crisis," July 1950, RG 9, MacArthur Papers; CINCFE to DA (JCS), 3 msgs., Junes 25, 1950, RG 9, MacArthur Papers. Other CINCFE msgs on Junes 25 and 26, 1950 may be also found in a special White House Subject File, Korea Classified, created and managed by George Else, the President's private secretary and historian, George M. Else Papers, Truman Library. See also Everett Drumright to J. Allison, July 5, 1950, Drumright Papers, Hoover Institution; William R. Matthews (editor, *Arizona Daily Sun*), "Korea with John Foster Dulles, June 24 - 29, 1950," Matthews Papers, University of Pennsylvania Library; Everett F. Drumright, "Visit to Korea of John Foster Dulles," "June, 1950, John Foster Dulles Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University.

the KPA. In less than eight hours - lightning speed in Washington - Truman with State and JCS approval authorized MacArthur to commit as many as two divisions to the battle (June 30, 1950). Thrilled by the timeliness of Washington's support, MacArthur had already decided on how to liberate South Korea and then to unify the entire peninsula as sanctioned by the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The decision-making elite of the Truman administration shared MacArthur's confidence that China would not intervene to prevent the unification of Korea under United Nations' sponsorship. The Chinese and Soviet leaders did not anticipate UN military operations beyond the Yalu. UNC air operations had not violated the border yet, and UNC public statements suggested that the Yalu river would still work as a de facto barrier to allied airstrikes. The United States had no international authority to widen the war beyond Korea. It had already set a precedent in 1945 - 1947: it would not use American troops or even American airpower to attempt to foil a Communist victory in the Chinese civil war. If anything, the State Department through it had already signaled that the United States had no intention of joining any war on the Asian mainland. The most surprised group in June, 1950 was the Central Military Commission in Beijing. American intervention in Korea added to the power within the Chinese Communist party of Mao Zedong and Mao's radicals and away from the pragmatic nation builders, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Zhaobeng.

As MacArthur predicted in July, 1950, the Eighth Army and the ROKA rallied in Taegu-Pusan perimeter and won a battle of attrition by mid-September, 1950. The critical elements of victory were the numbers of infantry, the superiority of United Nations Command's air and naval forces, the superiority of Eighth Army's artillery and anti-armor weapons, and American logistical riches. The generalship of Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker was superior despite the constant interference by MacArthur and his FECOM chief-of-staff and chief cheerleader, Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond. The amphibious turning movement by the U.S. X Corps and the liberation of Seoul (September 15 - 29) hurried the KPA's retreat from South Korea, insured by the Eighth Army's "breakout" counteroffensive from the Pusan Perimeter on September 16 - 17 and the subsequent two-week campaign that took the U.S. I Corps and ROK I Corps back to the 38th Parallel. True to his strategic conviction that "there is no substitute for victory," MacArthur joined the chorus of Truman's advisors who wanted the war to end with one Korea with its border on the Yalu River.<sup>9</sup>

Despite logistical risks and the employment of the U.S. IX Corps and half of the ROK army to reoccupy all of South Korea, MacArthur shared Washington's determination to march north,

---

<sup>8</sup> Transcripts of teleconference, CINCFE and JCS/Defense, June 30, 1950, msg 300740Z with notes in both MacArthur Papers and Elsey Korea File; conference notes, "Decisions, June 24-30, 1950, Elsey Korea File. MacArthur's views are recorded in detail in his msg C56942 to the JCS, MacArthur Papers, and General Wright's memoir (1971) previously cited. MacArthur's trip to Korea was described to me by Lt. Col. James H. Hausman, Gen. Paik Sun-yup, Lt. Gen. W. H. Sterling Wright, and Maj. Gen. Lim Sum-ha, all of whom were present.

<sup>9</sup> CINCFE Op Plan 9-50, September 29, 1950, File 810.012, 8th Army/Dean HC; Schnabel and Watson, *The Korean War*, Vol. 3, Pt. 1, 96-107; Allan R. Millett, *Crossing the 38th Parallel* (CFC/8th Army Historical Monograph 98-1, 1998); FECOM-JCS teleconference 144, October 17, 1950, Willoughby Papers; CINCPACFLT, "Korean War: U.S. Pacific Fleet Operations, Report 1, 25 June - 15 November 1950," 1951, Operational Archives, NHC, Washington Navy Yard.

at least beyond Pyongyang. MacArthur, ebullient in triumph, briefed his senior commanders in Seoul on September 29. He brushed aside any concern about Chinese intervention despite growing evidence that Mao Zedong had ordered the redeployment of twelve divisions of the PLA to Manchuria. Willoughby's assessments described the Chinese creation of the Northeast Border Defense Force with admirable accuracy. Confirmed by CIA reports as well as Chinese Nationalist and South Korean intelligence assessments, the massing of the PLA in Manchuria became a matter of serious concern for Truman and State's Asian diplomats. At MacArthur's October 15 meeting with the president at Wake Island, Truman pressed CINCFE for a clear opinion on the Chinese threat. MacArthur reassured Truman that the Chinese had missed their best chance to intervene in the first week of October. Pyongyang would fall within hours to the U.S. I Corps with the ROK II Corps on its eastern flank. The U.S. X Corps and ROK I Corps were clearing the eastern provinces of North Korea. Should the Chinese intervene now, the UNC air force would destroy the defenseless Chinese. "There would be the greatest slaughter," MacArthur told Truman. Truman was not so sure, but neither he nor JCS Chairman Omar Bradley pressed MacArthur about his airy predictions.<sup>10</sup>

No such optimism infected many of MacArthur's subordinate commanders, but CINCFE's optimism received support from three generals MacArthur favored: Willoughby, FEAF commander George Stratemeier, and X Corps commander Ned Almond. The other major commanders of all the service components - Eighth Army, Fifth Air Force, NAVFORFE - were not so impressed with MacArthur's prophecies. Even MacArthur's own FEC staff - except Willoughby - had reservations about the speed and geographical spread between Eight Army's and X Corps leading divisions. Local reports, refugee warnings, and the isolated but determined Communist resistance suggested stiffened defense by the NKPA, perhaps screening the advance of Chinese divisions south of the Yalu River.<sup>11</sup>

MacArthur remained insensitive to any evidence of an impending Chinese offensive. Willoughby reinforced CINCFE's lack of concern about Chinese intervention by explaining Chinese activities south of the Yalu, reported by agents and aerial reconnaissance, as a cordon defense of the Yalu bridges and power plants. New units, supply depots, and truck and rail traffic were simply Chinese efforts to strengthen the NKPA; the units were Manchurian Koreans formed as service forces. The same analysis applied to thickened Yalu air defenses. The FECOM position on the growth of the Northeast Frontier Defense Army remained firm

---

<sup>10</sup> Memo, "Wake Island," President's Secretary's Files (PSF), Truman papers, based on General Bradley's notes and Col. A. L. Hamblen notes and summary in the Wake Island File (PSF) which also includes notes by Averell Harriman, Dean Rusk, Thomas Pace, and Philip Jessup. Col. L. E. Bunker, MacArthur's aide, also kept notes and documents of the meeting, now held in his papers at the MacArthur Library. The "official" recorder, Miss Bernice Anderson, worked for Jessup, Secretary Acheson's special advisor. There can be no doubt that CINCUNC said there would be no Chinese attack.

<sup>11</sup> Willoughby's explanation that there was no serious intelligence lapse may be found G-2, memo, "Chinese Communist Potential for Intervention in the Korean War," 1951, which includes FECOM daily intelligence summaries, October - December 1950, Willoughby Papers. FECOM G-2 files include ROK and Eight Army intelligence assessments. The 5th Air Force reports are in the Gen. E. E. Partridge, USAF Papers, Airpower Research Institute, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. The limitations of communications intelligence are described in David A. Hatch and Robert L. Benson, *The Korean War: The SIGINT Background* (NSA, 2000).

through October: the PLA had created a large, immobile, under-gunned, ill-supplied army that would defend the north bank of the Yalu. ROK and American armies might make token appearances at the border, but MacArthur's guidance from the JCS was to keep UNC units away from the Chinese and Soviet frontiers, and he intended to follow his orders.<sup>12</sup>

Peng Dehuai, commander of the Chinese People's Volunteers Force, had already decided to test the UNC armies in battle. He had marched twelve divisions of light infantry (perhaps 100,000 men) and about 100 light artillery pieces into North Korea. His reconnaissance forces reported that the ROK II Corps (three divisions) was scattered across miles of North Korean hills, screening the right flank of the U.S. I Corps as it advanced along the west coast between Pyongyang and the Yalu. On October 26, 1950 the Chinese fell upon the ROK II Corps and routed the South Koreans in four days. Even more distressing, the remaining six Chinese divisions drove south past the ROK II Corps and attacked the ROK 1st Division on the right flank of the U.S. I Corps, thus starting an envelopment that might trap the rest of the U.S. I Corps (two divisions and the British Commonwealth brigade) north of the Chongchon River, some fifty miles above Pyongyang. Only desperate fighting by Paik Sun-yup's division and the 8th Cavalry Regiment, U.S. 1st Cavalry Division allowed the rest of the corps to retreat and regroup. The 8th Cavalry lost half its troops and most of its equipment. Then, on November 6, the Chinese disengaged and disappeared, leaving the Eighth Army stunned and numbed by temperatures that plunged toward zero and snows driven by Manchurian arctic winds.<sup>13</sup>

Despite clear evidence collected from Chinese POWs and casualties that these new enemy soldiers were members of the People's Liberation Army, not some imaginary force of Manchurian Koreans, MacArthur and Willoughby stuck to the belief that the Chinese had not really joined the war as a formal belligerent nation. Hardly any other senior UNC officers bought this fantasy. Even Ned Almond concluded that the real Chinese army had joined the war, but he could not really believe a bunch of "laundry men" could best an American army. MacArthur's response was to order the Far East Air Forces to unleash a maximum effort bombing campaign on every part of North Korea that might harbor enemy troops. The bombing aircraft encountered a new air threat, Soviet MiG-15 jet interceptors with North

---

<sup>12</sup> NIE, CIA, "Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea," November 6, 1950, NIE Files, PSF, Truman Papers; Proceedings, 71st NSC meeting November 9, 1950, NSC Files, PSF, Truman Papers; Memo for C/S USA from G-3, Army Staff, "State-Defense High Level Meeting on Korea," November 20, 1950, File 091 (Korea), RG 319.

<sup>13</sup> My key source on Chinese military activity in Korea is the Academy of Military Sciences, People's Liberation Army, *The Unforgotten Korean War*, written in 2006 by a team of PLA historians under contract to the Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense. It is an abridged and expanded version of the *Zhanguo Renmin Zhiyuanjun Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanshi* (1988 and 2000). I made three trips to China to consult with the AMS historians on Korea War issues, and I received invaluable assistance from Professors Li Xiaobing and Yu Bin, both veterans of the PLA and historians of the Korean War. The AMS English language account is enriched with the memoirs of senior Chinese commanders and CPVF documents. The maps are invaluable. A newer version (2014) of the *Kangmei Yunchao* has since appeared, but only in Chinese.

Korean markings flown by pilots who gave tactical directions in neither Chinese nor Korean.<sup>14</sup>

The evidence of Chinese and Russian intervention did not dissuade MacArthur from mounting one more grand offensive to win the war. Victory would be a unified, defensible Korea with borders on the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. MacArthur called the U.S. IX Corps north to join the rest of the Eighth Army, which placed two American and two ROK divisions on either side of the Chongchon-gang. The 3rd Infantry Division left theater reserve in Japan and joined the X Corps. The Eighth Army reserve included the 1st Cavalry Division, the 187th RCT Airborne, the Turkish brigade, the two British Commonwealth brigades, and three revived and rearmed ROK divisions. The lines of communication ran to Pyongyang by rebuilt railroad lines and by UNC shipping up the Taedong River, cleared of mines and obstacles. Fifth Air Force, FEAF Bomber Command, the two carrier air groups of Task Force 77, and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing stood ready to bomb the Communist armies back into the Qing dynasty despite the presence of MiG-15s and their not-so-mysterious pilots of the Soviet 64th Fighter-Interception Corps (IAK).<sup>15</sup>

MacArthur could not have been more confident that his great “compressing envelopment” with the Eighth Army as the anvil and X Corps as the hammer would crush whatever Chinese and Korean forces they could trap south of the Yalu. To appease the JCS and his own commanders, MacArthur postponed the offensive from November 15 to November 24 to allow more reconnaissance and logistical readiness. He also lobbied for more targeting freedom for his air forces. He dismissed the importance of the First Chinese Offensive and the damage the Chinese could do in stealthy, rapid nighttime movements. MacArthur ignored cautionary advice from Secretary of Defense Marshall and the State Department. CINCUNC regarded warnings from Great Britain as mere appeasement. All the debate in Washington over changing MacArthur’s guidance came to naught. On November 24 MacArthur and his entourage flew to North Korea to meet his ground force generals at Walker’s advanced headquarters at Sinanju, north of Pyongyang. The military business was mostly theater with a press conference as the center attraction. MacArthur predicted victory, even hoping he could send some troops home for Christmas. He then flew home on an extended route that took him across North Korea’s border provinces. With glee he pointed out to his companions, heavily engaged in celebrating

---

<sup>14</sup> G-2, Hdgs FECOM, “Order of Battle information Chinese Communist Army,” a compilation of reports and studies, November - December 1950, assembled in June, 1951, File 320.13, 8th Army Historical Archives (8th AHA), Dean Center, US Base Yongsan; entries, October - December 1950, “Personal Notes of Lt. Gen. E. M. Almond Covering Operation in Korea, Sept. 1950 - July, 1951,” Almond Papers; William T Y’Blood, *MiG Alley: The Fight for Air Superiority* (Air Force History and Museums Program, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> The two most detailed and document-based accounts in English are Billy Mossman, *Ebb and Flow: The United States Army in the Korean War* (Center of Military History, 1990) and Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (Texas A&M University Press, 1989). The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center holds document files for both works as well as the Joint Daily Situation Reports, compiled by the Joint Staff and sent to the White House and Department of Defense. United Nations Command compiled biweekly operational summaries and intelligence assessments, copies, Ridgway Papers and Gen. Mark W. Clark Papers, The Citadel library, Charleston, SC. The Air Force official history is Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953* (Office of the Chief of Air Force History, rev. ed., 1988), but I have relied more on Hdgs., Far East Air Forces, “Report on the Korean War,” 2 vols., 1953 and Institute for Air Weapons, Air University, “F-86 vs. MiG-15: A Digest of Briefings on the Analysis of the Korean Air War,” May 1954, Air University Library.



General Stratemeyer's sixtieth birthday, that he could see no sign of all these Chinese soldiers that others believed had come to attack United Nations Command.<sup>16</sup>

The Chinese People's Volunteers Force had come to Korea in two major expeditions from October 19 - 20 until November 25 when it assaulted the Eighth Army and X Corps. The first expedition of 120,000 (twelve divisions) conducted the attacks that ended on November 6. As a result of this success, Mao Zedong ordered Peng Dehuai's army to grow to thirty-six divisions in twelve armies, divided into two army groups. One group would attack the Eighth Army, the other the X Corps. Peng Dehuai, who had two decades of experience fighting the Nationalists and Japanese, now commanded a CPVF of 380,000 troops. Willoughby's best guess was that the Chinese army in Korea might be 100,000, but he did not credit the Chinese with enough arms to endanger a now-alert Eighth Army. Peng Dehuai and his closest staff and commanders understood the lethality of UNC's air forces and artillery. The troops marched only at night, carrying supplies on their backs or on pack animals. They hid by day in villages, caves, tunnels, ravines, and forests. They did not start cooking fires except when hidden at night. American reconnaissance aircraft could find trucks and trains, but not Chinese soldiers, who ate cold food and did not use radios. Peng Dehuai did not move towed artillery, only mortars and mountain guns that could be disassembled. He cut the ammunition allowance by half and put divisions armed with American weapons (courtesy of the Chinese Nationalists) in the lead. They could resupply themselves from captured US and ROK stocks and looted dead and POWs. The same policy applied to food and cold-weather clothing. Medical support was 19th century at best; only half of the wounded Chinese soldiers ever returned to duty. Mao Zedong and Peng Dehuai took little comfort from Stalin's counsel that the Chinese could create a great army by fighting the Americans just as the Red Army had learned by fighting the Germans.<sup>17</sup>

In two days, November 24 and 25, the CPVF reversed the strategic course of the Korean War by attacking all of the leading units of the Eighth Army and U.S. X Corps. The sheer breadth and ferocity of the Second Offensive staggered the most vulnerable UNC ground forces: an American division west of the Chongchon-gang, two American divisions astride the river, and two ROKA divisions on the Eighth Army's eastern flank. In the X Corps zone, the attacks fell on two concentrations of the 1st Marine Division at the Changjin Reservoir and upon an isolated regimental combat team of the 7th Infantry Division. Peng Dehuai's plan was to crush the U.S. I Corps north of the Chongchon-gang. The focus on "annihilating" the 1st Marine Division had psychological and strategic goals, to defeat the most formidable and publicized American division in Korea and then force X Corps (four more divisions) to

---

<sup>16</sup> CINCUNC to DA (JCS), November 25, 1950, FECOM General Files: Korea, RG 9 MacArthur Papers; entries November 24 and 25, 1950, Stratemeyer Korean War diaries, George Stratemeyer Papers, Air University Library.

<sup>17</sup> Chinese concerns are outlined in telegrams, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai to J. Stalin, November 15 - December 7, 1950, with Stalin's replies, reprinted in Katherine Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," *CWIHP Bulletin* (Nos. 6-7, Winter 1995/1996), 48-52; Peng Dehuai, "Summary of the 1st Campaign since Entering Korea and Principles for the Next Stage War Operations," November 13, 1950, reprinted in *The Unforgotten Korean War*, 137-142.

withdraw by sea and out of position to help the Eighth Army.<sup>18</sup>

As Eighth Army tried to assess its degree of danger and losses, MacArthur opened a fusillade of messages to Washington through the JCS to Truman that asserted that UNC faced “an entirely new war.” MacArthur could not admit he had not foreseen the timing or size of the Second Offensive. He was outraged at the Chinese, not surprised. Peng Dehuai had deceived him, impossible to admit. The Chinese intervention gave MacArthur a new opportunity to propose a bigger war against China: the use of Chinese Nationalist forces, a naval blockade of China, a bombing campaign throughout Manchuria, and the creation of an insurgency within the PRC. Despite a mutual security pact between China and the USSR signed early in 1950, MacArthur doubted that the USSR would widen its role in the war. He argued that a victory in Asia would end the threat of Communist military imperialism in Europe. It would end six years of appeasement of Stalin. MacArthur met with Walton Walker and Ned Almond in Tokyo the night of November 28 - 29 to assess the situation. Walker admitted that his IX Corps was close to ineffectiveness, but the I Corps had fought clear of the Chongchon-gang valley. Walker’s Eighth Army reserve had established a defensive line around Pyongyang. He had ample air support, supplies, and munitions to hold Pyongyang. Walker did not tell MacArthur that in his personal judgment the Eighth Army belonged back in South Korea. Ned Almond conceded that the 1st Marine Division and Task Force MacLean-Faith had to fight free of its traps, but he predicted their escape (right once, wrong once). He still had two American divisions and two ROK divisions in fighting fettle. Task Force 90, the theater amphibious force, could take the X Corps to Wonsan and thus anchor a Pyongyang-Wonsan line, a strategic option already approved by the JCS. Walker and Almond left Tokyo on the morning of November 29, believing MacArthur would order them to stay in North Korea.<sup>19</sup>

Instead, MacArthur reported to the JCS that his weakened and demoralized troops could not hold North Korea and, unless reinforced, might have to evacuate South Korea. He asked if he should plan a retrograde to Japan with the ROK refugees going to Cheju-do. Disregarding hysterical press reports of another Dunkirk or Bataan, the JCS wondered why CINCUNC’s reports of doom did not match the more measured reports from Eighth Army and X Corps. Truman’s advisory group of State and Defense officials sent General J. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff, to visit CINCUNC and his general staff as well as Walker and the Eighth Army. Chairman Bradley had high confidence in Walker’s chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Leven C. Allen, Bradley’s army group chief of staff in Europe. Allen had relevant experience, organizing the response to the German Ardennes offensive. Except for Willoughby, the FECOM staffers were realists, not hypnotized by MacArthur’s florid hyperbole. By December 9, with Collins’ trip complete, the Truman administration told MacArthur to hold South Korea and to forget evacuation. In the meantime, the JCS would find him more troops, especially heavy artillery and tactical aircraft. The ultimate goal was still a unified Korea, but not one created by another

---

<sup>18</sup> AMS, PLA, *The Unforgotten Korean War*, 153-157, 159-167.

<sup>19</sup> Copies of CINCFE-JCS msgs for November 29-30, 1950 with supporting 8th Army reports may be found in the Korea File, RG 9, MacArthur Papers and File 471B, “Korean Emergency,” Office Files, Truman Papers. The same file includes a JCS study, “Records of Actions Taken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff Relative to United Nations Operations in Korea... 1950-1951,” April 1951, copy in File 471B, Truman Papers.

invasion into the face of the Chinese Army.<sup>20</sup>

MacArthur could not accept a strategic posture that could end only in some sort of negotiated settlement. He never surrendered the goal of a battlefield victory that would force the Chinese to accept a united, pro-western Korea on their northern border. The State Department still wondered if the Chinese might accept a neutralized, unaligned, minimally armed Korea, the end state known as the “Austrian Solution.” The State policy advisors gave up this option since they knew Congress and the Japanese, soon to be liberated by the 1951 peace treaty and a new constitution, would never accept a Korea that was not part of an anti-Communist alliance system. Certainly Rhee, the ROK president and MacArthur’s ideological twin, could not abide by a peace that left Chinese troops in Korea. MacArthur regarded any settlement shaped by the Chinese as appeasement, the first steps to unification by UN diktat and eventual Communist domination of the peninsula and the first steps toward the subversion of Japanese prosperity and democracy. He could not bear this possible future.<sup>21</sup>

Later denying his desire to change the American acceptance of the Chinese revolution and the division of Korea, MacArthur began his “no substitute for victory” campaign to widen the war with China. From January until April 1951, when Truman ordered him into permanent retirement, MacArthur used his influence with Republican Congressmen and the news media to build public pressure on Truman not to negotiate an armistice with the Communists. He had vocal partners in the Syngman Rhee government and its American supporters. MacArthur also suggested that an appeasement movement in the United Nations led by Great Britain, Canada, and India received guidance from Beijing. Soviet spies in the British foreign office betrayed UNC’s plans. MacArthur even managed to preempt State’s early attempts to talk with the PRC about a truce by making a public appeal to Peng Dehuai and Kim Il-Sung to accept terms that implied a Communist defeat. Prodded by Acheson and W. Averell Harriman, his national security advisor, Truman relieved MacArthur and ordered him home after fifteen years of Asian service.<sup>22</sup>

MacArthur did not act surprised by his relief. Playing the role of the misunderstood stoic, he took his “no substitute for victory” campaign back to the United States where he received a hysterical public welcome and media coverage in full. He even told his inner circle

---

<sup>20</sup> Gen. J. L. Collins C/S, USA, File, “Korea Trips, July 1950 - January 1951,” J. Lawton Collins Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; memo, Conference, CINCFE-CS USA, December 8, 1950, Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, USAH & EC; Report, NSC 6814, and proceedings, 74th Meeting NSC, “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” December 14, 1950, National Security Files, PSF, Truman Papers.

<sup>21</sup> C/S USA and C/S USAF, memo, “Consultations with General MacArthur,” January 15 and 18, 1951, CCA 381 (Far East), Records of the JCS, RG 218; Office of the Secretary of Defense, memo, “Analysis of MacArthur Issues,” April, 1951, Sec Def Collection, Marshall Papers; NISE, CIA, Special Estimate No. 1, “International Implications of Maintaining a Beachhead in Korea,” January 11, 1951, Intelligence Files, PSF, Truman Papers.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to newspaper, TV, and newsreel coverage of MacArthur’s relief and return. MacArthur tells his part of the story in *Reminiscences*, 389-414. The Truman administration’s version is best understood by studying the personal accounts and messages traffic in a JCS file, “Events in Connection with the Change of Command in the Far East,” April 1951, CCS 013136, JCS Decimal File 1951, RG 218; Secretaries Acheson and Marshall kept files on MacArthur, now at the Truman Library. George Elsemy also collected copies of all of Truman’s statements and public accounts about MacArthur’s anti-armistice campaign.

that he knew Truman's action came from the President's growing mental instability and anti-media rages. In an address to Congress MacArthur made his case on national television and promised "to fade away," which he most certainly did not. In May, 1951, he again challenged Truman, Acheson, and Marshall before a joint committee of the Senate, again to broad media coverage. MacArthur now played another role, the general as victim, a reprise of a role he played in 1942. This time, however, he did not have the same success, and by the autumn of 1951, MacArthur had taken up residence in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, the refuge of Republican has-beens and the place to write memoirs.<sup>23</sup>

Despite his dire predictions of disaster, the American effort to hold Korea succeeded. Three more Chinese offensives in January - April 1951 did not force the UNC ground forces back to Pusan. The reversal of fortune had several sources, none true miracles. First, the Eighth Army took control of Almond's independent X Corps, ignoring MacArthur's mild protest. Walker's accidental death in a December traffic accident brought a new Eighth Army commander to Korea, Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway. A general of great force, considerable talent, and media appeal, Ridgway (with Walker's staff) banished uncertainty and confusion from his army. It had a mission: save South Korea and force the Communists to negotiate, both accomplished by November, 1951. Ridgway succeeded MacArthur as CINCUNC and SCAP in April, replaced by another proven fighter, Lt. Gen. James A. Van Fleet. The State Department found Ridgway difficult to manage in its international Korean armistice diplomacy, but Ridgway, even more adept at media manipulation than MacArthur, still played by Pentagon rules: keep the arguments inside the building.<sup>24</sup>

United Nations Command also received more forces via the reserve mobilization, the draft, and the training programs established during the crisis of 1950. Taking temporary priority over the buildup of NATO's forces in 1951, directed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Far East Command received two National Guard infantry divisions, sixteen more artillery battalions, two more tank battalions, and logistics and service units for Korea and Japan. The support system in Asia, staffed largely with Korean and Japanese workers, reached a new level of military largesse that even reached the South Korean army, expanding toward twenty divisions. Inventory control was a lost art. Ammunition, medical supplies, and gasoline flooded the war zone as the defense budget trebled in twelve months. The Department of the Army sent senior commanders and staff officers to Asia who had been the best division commanders and senior staffers in the war with Germany. The Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps did the same for its theater forces. Peng Dehuai's analysts told Beijing (much to Mao's displeasure) that the

---

<sup>23</sup> The most recent scholarly accounts of MacArthur's 1951 campaign to disrupt any armistice negotiations are Michael D. Perlman, *Truman and MacArthur: Policy Politics and Hunger for Honor and Renown* (Indiana University Press, 2008) and Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics and Public Opinion, 1950-1953* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Ridgway's journal and private papers, December 1950 - April 1951 reveal his difficulties with MacArthur over strategy and the operations of the 8th Army and his eventual alliance with the JCS over armistice terms and operations into North Korea. Ridgway Papers and Roy Appleman's book notes at the USAH & EC are essential for 1951 operations. Appleman provides a detailed narrative in *Ridgway Duels for Korea* (Texas A&M University Press, 1990). Ridgway wrote his own account in *The Korean War* (Doubleday, 1967).

CPVF could not match UNC's capability without much more Soviet weapons modernization and training. Unless Communist air defenses and transportation system improved, the CPVF was doomed to positional defense and a war of attrition. Forget Formosa and negotiate an armistice. The United States-Japan alliance made the PRC more vulnerable and dependent on Soviet military assistance, a relationship Mao Zedong loathed as long as Stalin lived.<sup>25</sup>

If there is a surprise in MacArthur's role in the Korean War, it is his residual influence on American Asian policy. The Korean War itself may have had greater influence. Nevertheless, MacArthur believed that the "Asia First" group in Congress would ensure the salvation of the Republic of China on Taiwan, no longer Formosa. The Asia Firsters protected Japan, the Philippines, French Indochina, Malaya, Hong Kong, and Thailand. They fought extremist Muslim nationalism in Indonesia, but supported Indonesian radicals against the Communists in the 1960s and supported military dictators in Pakistan, Burma, Thailand, and Indonesia. The Sino-Soviet split the State Department had hoped to encourage eventually occurred, more through American military pressure and economic realities than through clever diplomacy. For better or for worse - worse in the case of Vietnam - the surprise is that American influence in Asia looked MacArthuresque without MacArthur.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Doris Condit, *The Test of War, 1950-1953* Vol. II in *History of the office of Secretary of Defense* (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1988). For a sound survey of Sino-Soviet relations, see Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford University Press, 1993). See also Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> For one such interpretation, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (Basic Books, 2017). See also Gerrit W. Gong ed., *Remembering and Forgetting: The Legacy of War and Peace in East Asia* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996).

