

Korea and Japan in US Strategy, 1945-1955

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It is easy to look at the extensive US military position in the Asia-Pacific today, what some call the empire of bases, and conclude that this has been the goal of American strategy all along. That was not the case. During World War II, American military and diplomatic policymakers did not envision a long-term US presence on the Asian mainland. Yet five years after the end of the war, the United States had become the protector of the Republics of Korea and China. How did that happen?

The American position in East Asia in the second half of the twentieth century resulted from a series of ad hoc decisions and improvised responses to the chaos that followed in the wake of Japan's collapse. The United States was an East Asian power before World War II by virtue of its treaty rights in China and possession of the Philippine islands. Nevertheless, American policymakers did not consider the region vital to their country's economic or security interests. Throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, the United States avoided direct confrontation with the Great Powers in Asia and pursued a policy of compromise and conciliation.¹ That policy continued even after Japan seized control of Manchuria in 1931.

During the next decade, as Japanese forces invaded and conquered large portions of China, Americans expressed sympathy for China, but neither President Herbert Hoover nor President Franklin D. Roosevelt deemed American interests in the region worth the risks of war.

Europe more readily commanded American attention. Roosevelt's policy toward Japan stiffened after Tokyo joined the Axis pact in 1940 thereby linking the war in China to the one in Europe. It was only after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, however, that the United States risked war with Japan by embargoing the sale of oil. At this time, the danger that Japan would attack the Soviet Union while the Red Army struggled against the German onslaught was foremost in Roosevelt's mind. For Roosevelt, Russia loomed as an indispensable ally in the fight against Germany. The oil embargo would immobilize Japan, Roosevelt hoped, and buy time to strengthen the merging coalition against Germany. In other words, it was the

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¹ The most famous statements of American policy, Secretary of State John Hay's Open Door Notes of 1899 and 1900, were never intended to commit the U.S. to action in defense of American interests in Asia. As the historian Warren Cohen observed, Hay did all he could with six pieces of paper. Warren I Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 5th edition), 42-48; Raymond A. Esthus, "The Changing Concept of the Open Door, 1899-1910," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, December 1959, Vol. 46, No. 3, 435-454.

goal of defeating Germany in Europe, not the protection of China or American interests in Asia, that led the United States to cross the threshold of war with Japan.²

Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war alongside Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China. In keeping with prewar planning, American strategy called for the invasion of continental Europe as quickly as possible. The United States would seek to curtail Japanese advances in the Pacific, but no strategic offensive was contemplated there until the allies had established a foothold in Western Europe. This Europe First strategy shaped American planning for postwar Asia. The strategy for defeating Japan was linear and sequential: Military effort focused on Japan's home islands first, Japan's empire, including Manchuria, China, and Korea, was secondary.

In keeping with American military strategy and the drive towards Japan's home islands, planning for the liberated areas of Asia was less well developed than preparations for Japan. By the last year of the war, the US was publicly committed to seeing Japan's colony of Taiwan returned to Nationalist China. Japan's colony of Korea was to become independent in "due course" but nothing more was said about how that would be accomplished. Japan remained the focus of American attention in terms of military strategy and postwar planning.

After Germany's surrender in May 1945, American postwar plans were thrown into turmoil as preparations for the invasion of Japan began to tax American manpower and economic resources. With the projected defeat of Japan still a year away, the United States would not be able to spare combat forces for other purposes. Given these circumstances, American military planners acknowledged that the United States would not be able to control postwar developments on the Asian mainland through force. Making the best of the situation, they concluded that if the United States controlled Japan, other developments in Asia, including civil war in China or Soviet expansion into Manchuria, would not imperil American security. This was a calculated policy that balanced ends and means.³ It was an offshore strategy shaped by a sense of limits and restraint. In adopting this minimalist approach to the Asian mainland, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) complicated the achievement of the United States's public policy of support for a united China under the government of Chiang Kai-shek. The tension between these two policies, what historian Ernest May labeled the calculated versus the axiomatic, would plague American policymakers well after Chiang's Nationalist government was driven off the mainland by the victorious Chinese Communists. Following Japan's surrender, American policymakers would face a similar dilemma in Korea.⁴

And then the war ended much sooner than most people expected. Suddenly, the Allies faced the problem of determining who would take the surrender of Japanese troops that were

² Waldo Heinrichs, "The Russian Factor in Japanese-American Relations, 1941" in Hilary Conroy and Harry Wray, eds. *Pearl Harbor Reexamined: Prologue to the Pacific War* (Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 163-178; Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 178-179.

³ Waldo Heinrichs and Marc Gallicchio, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 416-507; Marc S. Gallicchio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia: U.S.-East Asian Policy and the Fall of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 29-37.

⁴ Ernest R. May, "The Nature of Foreign Policy: The Calculated versus the Axiomatic," *Daedalus*, Fall, 1962, Vol. 91, No. 4, (Fall, 1962), pp. 653-667.

scattered across Asia. In a flurry of late-night activity US officials drafted what became known as General Order No. 1. This order had immense political significance and had to be approved by the other major powers (Soviet Union, Britain, China) to avoid confusion and confrontation.

One of the most fateful decisions made in the creation of the General Order placed the southern half of Korea in the US occupation zone. In contrast to the elaborate preparations for Japan, the United States had made virtually no plans for occupying Korea. President Franklin Roosevelt had occasionally suggested to his staff that a four-power trusteeship (US, UK, USSR, and China) could serve as an interim step, but there had been no discussion of that idea with the Allies. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the State Department to bring that issue up at the Potsdam Conference, President Truman and his secretary of state left the conference without raising the matter. Military planners, who mistakenly assumed that the State Department had consulted with the allies about the four-power trusteeship, were surprised when the British informed them that they had made no plans to send occupation forces to Korea. Shortly afterward, Chiang notified the Americans that he would be unable to contribute to the occupation of Japan and Korea.⁵ In early September, the United States occupied Korea below the 38th parallel and took the surrender of Japanese there. Soviet forces did the same above the dividing line.

It was an irony of the immediate postwar period in Asia that Japan, the realm of the former enemy, was the least volatile area in the region. In keeping with wartime planning, the American-led occupation government in Japan pursued a liberal New Deal approach by implementing a series of reforms that depoliticized the emperor, purged Japan's wartime leaders, introduced a sweeping land reform program, produced a new constitution that protected freedom of religion, free speech, the right of labor to organize, and recognized women as equal members of the nation. The new constitution also famously contained a provision, Article 9, that renounced "war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."

Historians disagree over whether General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers in Japan (SCAP) proposed the idea of a peace constitution or merely accepted the Japanese decision to include a renunciation of war in their new frame of government. In any case, what appears most striking for the purposes of this paper is that MacArthur's dream of a permanently disarmed Japan appears not to have disturbed any of his colleagues in the Pentagon. How do we account for this apparent lack of concern among military planners who only several years later would expend considerable effort to undo MacArthur's handiwork?

A partial answer can be found in the difficulty military strategists found in adjusting their thinking to the new circumstances they confronted after the war. In the year after Japan's surrender, American military planners found themselves waging a new kind of struggle on several fronts. Domestic pressure to withdraw American forces and reduce commitments around the world, congressional demands to cut spending, and the State Department's plans

⁵ The summary in the preceding paragraphs is drawn from Marc S. Gallicchio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia: U.S.-East Asian Policy and the Fall of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 59-92; and Idem, *The Scramble for Asia: U.S. Military Power in the Aftermath of the Pacific War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), ix-125.

to turn the captured Pacific islands into United Nations' trusteeships bedeviled strategists and scrambled efforts to develop coherent plans. The unsettled situation only reinforced the Joint Chiefs' inclination to follow through on earlier plans and hang on to what they already controlled. The former Japanese Mandates and Okinawa fell into this category. So did the home islands, but here the thinking was in terms of keeping Japan down and denying its war making potential to a future enemy. The JCS were not indifferent to the potential for conflict with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, they had based their postwar plans on the assumption that the United States would lack the power to shape events on the Asian mainland. Postwar defense planning for Asia had been cast in negative terms, the objective was to deny an aggressor bases from which to launch an attack. The influence of wartime planning for Japan and the possibility that a united China might yet emerge from the war also help to explain the apparent lack of interest on the part of the JCS to the new Japanese constitution.⁶

The emerging confrontation between the US and Soviet Union once again focused American attention on Europe. The main local condition affecting American policy in Asia was the civil war in China between the Nationalists and Communists, which grew increasingly more dire for the Nationalists. The United States continued to aid the Nationalists but stopped well short of committing American forces to the fray. In 1947, the American withdrawal from the Korean peninsula began with United Nations supervised elections that created the Republic of Korea headed by the anticommunist authoritarian Rhee Syngman. As the communists moved closer to victory in China, conservative American and Japanese opponents of the liberal occupation policies pointed to Japan's desperate economic conditions and warned that the occupation's early reforms were preparing the country for communist subversion. In what became known as the Reverse Course, the United States made economic rehabilitation the top priority in Japan and deemphasized democratization.

Elsewhere in Asia, the United States began to withdraw from its forward positions. By late 1949, the Americans had withdrawn 50,000 troops from the newly created Republic of Korea, leaving only a token military advisory group of five hundred men behind. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that "the U. S. had little strategic interest in maintaining existing troops and bases in Korea." General MacArthur, the senior US military representative in Asia, agreed.⁷ By the summer of 1949, Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek had fled to Taiwan with the remnants of his government. The Truman administration had become resigned to a Communist victory

⁶ Roger Dingman, "Strategic Planning and the Policy Process: American Plans for War in East, 1945-1950," *Naval War College Review* (November-December 1979), 32:6, 4-21; Dingman, "American Policy and Strategy in East Asia, 1898-1950: The making of A Commitment," in Joe C. Dixon, ed. *The American Military and the Far East* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 34-37; Lester J. Faltos, "The New Pacific Barrier: America's Search for Security in the Pacific, 1945-1947" *Diplomatic History* (Summer 1989) 13:3, 317-342.

⁷ During his tenure as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan, MacArthur also had authority over US forces in Korea in his dual capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Far East Command. MacArthur exhibited little interest in American involvement on the peninsula. Discussion of U.S. plan to withdraw troops from Korea in 1949. White House, 24 Feb. 1953. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349455858/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=4. See also, "Conclusion," in William Stueck, ed., *The Korean War in World History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 180.

on the Chinese mainland but remained undecided about the fate of Taiwan. Secretary of State Dean Acheson expected the Chinese Communists to take control of the island and eliminate the last vestiges of Nationalist rule.⁸

The JCS and MacArthur objected to Acheson's abandonment of Taiwan. They argued that Chiang's redoubt would pose a threat to the US position in Asia if it came under the control of the Soviet Union. During early 1950, the competing factions in the Truman administration reached an uneasy compromise in which Acheson agreed that the US would seek to deny Taiwan to the Communists in the event of a general war. The possibility that France would lose control of Indochina to the communist-led Vietminh also disturbed American strategists. Ultimately, however, the Truman administration settled on a policy of aid to France short of direct military intervention. Slowly, a strategy anchored on the offshore island chain running through Japan and the Philippines appeared to be taking shape. This agreement on a defensive perimeter reflected a series of bureaucratic compromises that represented the least common denominator in American strategic counsels. Far from a consensus, the defensive perimeter could more accurately be described as a temporary truce between competing government interests.⁹

Retrenchment to a defensive perimeter on the offshore islands amplified the importance of keeping Japan out of the communist camp. American officials disagreed, however, on how best to secure Japan's support. Secretary of State Acheson and British Foreign Minister Ernst Bevin agreed that prolonging the occupation would alienate the Japanese and risk losing Tokyo's cooperation in building an anticommunist bulwark in the Pacific. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Omar Bradley countered that a peace treaty would jeopardize the American position in the Pacific by leaving Japan open to Soviet penetration.¹⁰

The JCS opposed an early peace treaty because they feared that Japan, once free of the American controls, would eventually realign itself with the communist powers in Asia. The Chiefs argued that the loss of Japan would deprive them of a vital base of operations and place Japan's industrial potential at the disposal of the Soviet Union. By 1949, American military planners had reconstituted their war plans in such a way as to make Japan an important point of attack against the Soviet Union. The primary objective of these plans was still to deny Japan's war making potential to the enemy, but a new offensive scheme had been layered on top of the older defensive strategy. The air force, which sought to ring the Soviet Union with bases,

⁸ Warren I. Cohen, "Acheson, His Advisors, and China, 1949-1950," in Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs, *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations, 1947-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 13-52.

⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, "The Strategic Perspective: The Rise and Fall of the 'Defensive Perimeter' Concept, 1947-1951," and Waldo Heinrichs, "Summary of Discussion," both in Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs, *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations, 1947-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 61-118, and 119-128; Russell Buhite, "'Major Interests': American Policy toward China, Taiwan, and Korea, 1945-1950," *Pacific Historical Review* (August 1978), 47:3, 425-451; Michael D. Pearlman, *Truman & MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Renown* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 27-55.

¹⁰ John Swenson-Wright, *Unequal Allies? United States Security and Alliance Policy Toward Japan, 1945-1960* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 40-41; Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27-30.

settled into Misawa and other airfields, including those on Okinawa. The navy also found a new reason to stay on in Japan. Under the direction of Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Forrest Sherman, the navy adopted a new maritime strategy that called for carrier task groups to destroy the Soviet Union's Pacific naval and air forces at their source by striking Soviet bases and airfields. With the loss of Tsingtao on the China coast, the former Japanese naval base at Yokosuka became even more desirable as a staging area for the American fleet. In short, the Joint Chiefs were prepared to block a peace treaty unless they could assure their continued control of bases in Japan deemed necessary to American security.¹¹

Despite Defense Department opposition, Acheson moved forward on the treaty and placed the prominent Republican John Foster Dulles in charge of the negotiations. This dynamic, in which the State Department and its diplomats in Japan showed more sensitivity to Japanese desires for a restoration of national sovereignty, and the Defense Department and its officers in the field insisted on maintaining American dominance, would repeat itself over the next two decades.

Dulles disparaged the Joint Chiefs insistence on using Japan as an offensive base of operations in the Cold War. He insisted that the United States could protect Japan with a defensive pact and limited Japanese rearmament. Dulles departed from Acheson's preferences, however, by urging the Secretary to devote greater American resources to the defense of South Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.¹² Acheson remained focused on Europe. He had no intention of becoming entangled on the Asian mainland. Chiang Kai-shek would have to fend for himself. In the meantime, Syngman Rhee appeared to be the greatest threat to peace on the Korean peninsula. Acheson and the Joint Chiefs were determined to keep offensive weapons out of Rhee's hands. Rhee would have to be content with control of half of the Korean peninsula. It did not occur to Acheson or the Joint Chiefs, that North Korea would strike first.

The North Korean invasion across the 38th parallel was a clear violation of the Republic of Korea's sovereignty and a dramatic challenge to the viability of the United Nations. The international repercussions of North Korea's invasion of the South reverberated throughout Asia. American air and forces in Japan came to the aid of South Korea and began building for a breakout from the Pusan perimeter. Japanese military and civilian personnel contributed to the United Nations effort in Korea.¹³ In the first few days of the invasion, it seemed that the North Korean assault could be the first stage of a wider war. That prompted implementation of Acheson's concession to the JCS regarding the defense of Taiwan. Chiang and his regime were saved from almost certain defeat.

Historians have debated the extent to which the outbreak of the Korean War was an abrupt turning point in the Cold War. Some skepticism about the transformative effects of the

¹¹ This interpretation of U.S. strategy is based on Dingman, "Strategic Planning," idem, "Reconsiderations: The United States-Japan Security Treaty, Pacific Community (July 1976), 7:4, 471-493; Michael A. Palmer, *Origins of the Maritime Strategy: American Strategy in the First Postwar Decade* (Washington, D.C., 1988), 22-29, and Marc Gallicchio "The Kuriles Controversy: U.S. Diplomacy in the Soviet-Japan Border Dispute, 1941-1956," *Pacific Historical Review* (February 1991), 60:1; 88-89.

¹² Schaller, *Altered States*, 29.

¹³ For Japan's role in the war see the papers by Mike Mochizuki, Futoshi Shibayama, Ki-Jeong Nam in this volume.

war seems warranted where American policy towards Japan was concerned. As Roger Dingman notes, Japanese and American negotiators were already nearing consensus on the terms of the peace settlement before June 25, 1950.¹⁴ On the other hand, the return of US ground forces to Korea and American intervention in the Taiwan Strait were dramatic and unexpected reversals of American commitments with consequences that remain relevant today.

The North Korean invasion, followed by the Chinese Communist intervention in November, also provided the impetus for the dramatic transformation of the US defense establishment. Before the outbreak of the Korean War, the Truman administration had resisted calls to greatly expand military spending despite the darkening situation in Asia. The Soviet Union's successful test of an atomic bomb in September 1949, and the victory of the Chinese communist forces in October, prompted Acheson to direct the State Department's Policy Planning Staff to conduct a thorough review of national security strategy. The announcement of the Sino-Soviet security treaty in February 1950 bolstered the position of those like the Policy Planning Staff's director Paul Nitze, who decried Truman's cautious fiscal policy. In April Nitze submitted his recommendations in a report known as National Security Policy memorandum 68. Sounding more like a jeremiad than a policy analysis, NSC 68 warned that the United States faced imminent danger unless it swiftly adopted a massive rearmament program.

President Truman was unmoved by NSC 68's warnings. In keeping with his offshore strategy, Truman prepared a modest defense budget of \$13.3 billion dollars for fiscal year 1951. Undeterred, the supporters of NSC 68 lobbied for adoption of its recommendations by leaking portions of the document to the press.¹⁵ The North Korean invasion tipped the battle of the budget in favor of the supporters of NSC 68 by appearing to show that the president's fiscal restraint had left South Korea exposed to attack. Further opposition was futile. In the summer of 1950, Truman submitted an \$11.7 billion dollar supplement to the defense budget. Congress quickly approved the initial \$13.3 billion and the supplemental budget, bringing the FY1951 budget to \$25 billion dollars. In January 1951 Truman responded to China's entry into the Korean war and the rout of United Nations forces with a second supplemental appropriation of \$16.8 billion. The initial budget and two supplemental requests brought defense spending to levels envisioned by the authors of NSC 68.¹⁶

The Korean War led to unexpected increases in defense spending and commitments to the Republics of Korea and China, but it did not alter the place of Asia in American global priorities. As war raged on the peninsula, Europe remained the main theater for the United States. East Asia ranked third behind Europe and the Mediterranean as areas of concern for American military planners. During the war, the Truman administration announced that it was dispatching an additional four divisions to Europe, bringing the total there to six. Those four

¹⁴ Roger Dingman, "The Dagger and the Gift: The Impact of the Korean War on Japan, *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* (Spring 1993), 2:1, 32-34.

¹⁵ Ernest R. May, *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1993), 14.

¹⁶ Samuel F. Wells, Jr., *Fearing the Worst: How Korea Transformed the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 477-480; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 109-110.

divisions would augment the Seventh Army, an organization that was, in contrast to the Eighth Army in Korea, built for the long haul. The Seventh Army received more training, newer equipment, and developed greater unit cohesion than the embattled forces meeting the Korean emergency.¹⁷ The United States also increased pressure on NATO countries to rearm, initiated the process for German rearmament and membership in NATO, accepted Greece and Turkey into the alliance, and transformed the pact into a functioning organization with a headquarters and command structure.¹⁸

In Asia, Japan remained the main priority. After the outbreak of the war in Korea, Dulles accelerated his efforts to conclude the peace treaty with Japan. As he moved ahead on drafting the settlement, he encountered more difficulty forging agreement with the Pentagon than with America's allies. Concessions from Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru on the creation of a nascent military establishment and the preservation of US bases in Japan satisfied the Joint Chiefs and enabled Dulles to complete his work in time for the signing of a peace treaty and separate US-Japan security treaty in September 1951. Yoshida agreed in July to expand the National Police from 30,000 to 75,000 men, the Maritime Safety Patrol from 8,000 to 16,000 men, and create a separate 75,000-man Japanese National Police Reserve (JPNR). He subsequently accepted a package deal that contained a generously worded peace treaty, an unequal security pact, and even more onerous basing and status of forces agreements. The peace treaty ended the occupation in the home islands but left the Ryukyus (including Okinawa) and the Bonins, under American administrative control while acknowledging Japan's "residual sovereignty" over those islands. The security treaty permitted the United States the right to use its forces in Japan "to contribute to the maintenance of international security and peace in the Far East," but did not obligate American forces to defend Japan.

The security pact also provided that upon invitation from the Japanese government, American forces could be used to quell internal disturbances instigated by outside powers. The ensuing bases and status of forces agreements further dramatized the extent to which the new security arrangements infringed on Japanese sovereignty. Under these agreements, the United States kept more than two thousand bases and installations scattered throughout the main islands. A separate administrative agreement protected American personnel from prosecution in Japanese courts.

The administrative agreement highlighted the differing perspectives of American military officers and diplomats. Dulles objected that the exemption of US personnel from Japanese jurisdiction would sow discord in Japan and harm America's standing throughout Asia. The American ambassador in Tokyo and the Asian specialists in the State Department shared Dulles's concerns. All stressed the importance of recognizing Japan as an equal sovereign country. They argued that US bases and legal arrangements would be meaningless without Japanese cooperation. The Joint Chiefs countered that the preservation of American

¹⁷ David T. Fatua, "The 'Long Pull' Army: NSC 68, the Korean War, and the Creation of the Cold War U.S. Army," *The Journal of Military History*, (Jan, 1997), 61:1, 93-120, especially 113.

¹⁸ Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24:4 (Dec., 1980), 563-592; William Stueck, "The Korean War as International History," *Diplomatic History*, Fall 1986), 10:4, 291-309.

prerogatives was a matter of military necessity. They dismissed Japanese calls for terms like those recently negotiated with NATO countries by pointing out that it would be unconscionable to place American servicemen under the jurisdiction of a “conquered” and “oriental” country. In making these arguments, the Chiefs knew that they could count on Congressional support for their position. The JCS gained their objectives in the short term, but the continuation of American dominion over Japan set the stage for persistent friction within the alliance.¹⁹

Japan’s change in status from occupied territory to restricted independence prompted the National Security Council to draft a broad statement of American policies and courses of action towards its new ally. Completed in July 1952, the document cautiously forecast that Japan would “maintain close alignment with the US at least through 1954”; that Japan and the United States would combine their efforts to maintain Japanese security; and the United States would support Japanese rearmament. Under “Course of Action,” the NSC prescribed several policies to assure that Japan’s leaders continued to see the benefits of aligning with the West. These included a strong American military posture in the Pacific and efforts to help Japan develop a self-supporting, expanding economy and international trade.²⁰

In the short-term, the NSC recommended that the United States support the creation of a Japanese military establishment consisting of a ten-division balanced ground force with supporting air and naval forces. Looking farther ahead, the NSC hoped that Japan would participate in regional security programs in Asia. These basic objectives, Japanese rearmament, a strong United States military posture in Asia centered in Japan, Japanese economic development, and integration in regional economic and security arrangements, became the desiderata for the incoming administration of President Dwight Eisenhower.

Much has been written about Eisenhower’s efforts to reduce defense spending through implementation of a coherent strategy for waging Cold War over the long haul. The resulting approach, dubbed the New Look, explicitly rejected the crisis-based assumptions of NSC 68 as well as the financial burden entailed in its execution. Eisenhower’s grand strategy relied on nuclear deterrence, military assistance to allied forces, covert operations, and psychological warfare, while reducing the number of American servicemen posted overseas.²¹

To implement his strategic vision, Eisenhower chose John Foster Dulles for secretary

¹⁹ John Swenson-Wright, *Unequal Allies?*, 96-105; Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race, and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945-1965* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 122-123; Jennifer M. Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 160-161.

²⁰ Interim Policy With Respect to. NSC 125. Transmittal Note, James S. Lay, Transmittal Note, James S. Lay, Jr., Exec. Secy, to the National Security Council. July 18, 1952. 2 p. Encl: Same title. Draft Statement of Policy. 16 p. National Security Council, 18 July 1952. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349391080/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=3. Michael Schaller has suggested, the JCS probably emphasized the importance of Southeast Asia to Japan as a bureaucratic move to justify a larger military commitment to the region. On the JCS response see Michael Schaller, “The Korean War: The Economic and Strategic Impact on Japan, 1950–1953,” in Stueck, ed., *The Korean War in World History*, 159-160.

²¹ Robert J. McMahon, “US national security policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, volume 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 288-311; accessed at Cambridge Histories Online <https://doi-org.ezp1.villanova.edu/10.1017/CHOL9780521837194>

of state and Admiral Arthur Radford for chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Dulles was a prominent Republican with extensive experience in international affairs, the most recent being the successful negotiation of the Japanese Peace Treaty and the US-Japan Security Treaty. He was an obvious choice, although his affiliation with the failed presidential candidate New York Governor Thomas Dewey in 1948 and his East Coast corporate credentials made him suspect in the eyes of Republican proponents of an “Asia First” foreign policy. Eisenhower sought to head off any objections to Dulles by appointing Arthur Radford, an “Asia First” Admiral, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Radford shared Eisenhower’s views on cutting defense costs and the utility of nuclear deterrence, but the admiral’s support for an assertive military strategy in Asia almost immediately became an embarrassment to the president. Radford took seriously the Republican Party’s pledge to roll back the Bamboo Curtain. In a little over a year, Radford recommended using atomic weapons in Asia three times.²² Radford’s inability to reconcile the defensive nature of the New Look with his own vigorous anti-communism foreshadowed what would become a persistent internal conflict in Eisenhower’s cold war strategy in Asia.

One of the new administration’s first tasks was to end the Korean War. Eisenhower promptly honored his campaign promise to go to Korea. Ending the conflict proved more difficult but Stalin’s death in March 1953 made that task easier. In July 1953 the belligerents agreed to an armistice on the divided peninsula. Following the armistice, the Eisenhower administration sought to resolve the lingering problems created by America’s unplanned involvement in the Korean War. American forces, under the authority of the United Nations, remained below the 38th parallel to enforce the cease fire and protect the Republic of Korea. Nevertheless, the stationing US forces on the peninsula made the importance of South Korea to American defense strategy no clearer than it had been on June 24, 1950.

During the autumn of 1953, the Joint Chiefs struggled to develop a plan for defending the Republic of Korea if North Korea resumed hostilities. Working on the assumption that North Korea would receive support from the PRC, the Chiefs drafted plans that called for the use of nuclear weapons against bases in Manchuria. Dulles rejected those proposals with the argument that he did not think the communists would be deterred by “scattering a few A bombs around.” He subsequently objected to revised plans on the grounds that attacking areas outside of Korea would bring the Russians into the war. After additional revisions, the National Security Council approved a plan that called for the use of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula with other non-nuclear operations against areas directly supporting an invasion. As the official history of the JCS explained, the plan “contemplated nuclear (but not necessarily general) war to defend Korea.”²³

Dulles’s concerns that the JCS’s original plans might provoke war with the Soviet Union

²² Marc Gallicchio, “The Best Defense is a Good Offense: The Evolution of American Strategy in East Asia, 1953-1960,” in Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye, eds. *The Great Powers in East Asia, 1953-1960* (New York, 1990), 63.

²³ Robert J. Watson, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*. Volume 5. *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1953 - 1954* (Washington, DC, Office of Joint History Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1998), 227.

were, by themselves, well-founded. It turned out, however, that Dulles had also identified a contradiction in the Chiefs' assessment of Korea's importance to American security. The JCS plan called for the use of nuclear weapons to protect Korea from attack if the communists resumed the war on the peninsula on the grounds that the loss of South Korea would be a blow to the credibility of the United States in the Cold War. But they deemed Korea to have little value in a global war against the Soviet Union. In the event of a more general conflict, designated American naval and air forces would engage in offensive action against Soviet ports and airfields after which most of those units would be withdrawn for deployment to Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf. The remaining forces would defend the offshore line running from Japan through the Kra Isthmus. The Chiefs did not think that Thailand, Indochina, or Korea could be held against the combined weight of the PRC and Soviet Union.

The decision to exclude the Republic of Korea from the areas to be held was the most controversial aspect of these plans. Early versions of the Joint Outline Emergency War Plan highlighted the anomalous position of Korea in American strategic thinking. The plan expected United States forces to retreat from the peninsula within three months of the outbreak of war.²⁴ General John E. Hull, the army's Commander-in-Chief in the Far East (CINCFE) criticized this "desertion of an ally" and predicted that it would lead to the defection of all twenty ROK divisions. To remedy the situation, he offered a grim but more honorable alternative. Hull recommended reducing the number of troops in Korea to a point where their loss would be militarily acceptable. In the event of a war with the Soviet Union, American forces would fight alongside their Korean allies until they were driven from the peninsula, thus making it possible for the United States to make use of the surviving Korean units.²⁵ Either way, however, American officials expected Korea to be overrun.

The administration's emphasis on nuclear deterrence and simultaneous cost-cutting through troop redeployments from their overseas stations, complicated US efforts to implement a coherent strategy for East Asia. In Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, the administration faced persistent resistance from firmly entrenched national leaders with competing goals. The Republics of China and Korea posed similar problems for the US policymakers. President Syngman Rhee and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek viewed redeployment of US forces as inimical to their revanchist ambitions. Both leaders also sought American aid in beefing up their armed forces well beyond what was needed for defensive purposes. In Korea, General Hull recommended reducing the American commitment to two divisions, one from the army, the other from the marines. General James Van Fleet, who had been sent to Asia by Eisenhower

²⁴ Reexamination of U.S. Programs for National Security, NSC 141, January 19, 1953, reel 1, Documents of the NSC, First Supplement, University Publications of America (UPA); Brief of Far East Command Emergency War Plan, February 8, 1954, box 395, and Strategic Concept for Global War, September 7, 1955, box 314, both in OP-30S/OP-60S, Subject and Serial Files, series xvi, Records of the Strategic Plans Division, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as OP30S, SPD, OA, NHC); Joint Strategic Objectives Plan (JSOP) for and (sic) Assumed D-Day of 1 July 1956. TOP SECRET. Declassified June 2, 1976. Department Of Defense, 8 Jan. 1953. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349376943/USDD?

²⁵ CINCFE (Hull) to JCS, April 27, 1954, CCS USSR (3-2-46), sec 73, RG 218 (Records of the JCS), Geographic File, 1957, Modern Military Reference Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter cited as MMRB, NA).

to survey the needs of America's allies, concurred but he cautioned against removing US forces from Korea too quickly. The JCS accepted the necessity of drawing down US forces in Korea, but it took more than a year for them to reach agreement with Rhee about the timing of the redeployment and the number of the size of the Korean military establishment they would equip and support. Van Fleet recommended cutting ROK ground forces almost by half, from 700,000 to 380,000. Korean officials resisted such drastic reductions and eventually agreed to a force of 661,000 for the 1955 fiscal year. That total would shrink over time as active-duty troops moved into the reserves.²⁶ Negotiations with Chiang proved even more difficult, especially when his provocative deployment of troops in what became the first offshore islands crisis (1954-1955) nearly dragged the US into confrontation with the PRC.

American problems with Japan were of a different order than those of South Korea and Taiwan. The main source of frustration lay in the Americans' inability to coax the Japanese government to expand its military establishment to meet agreed goals for Japan's Self Defense Forces. The Americans had to consider Japanese public opinion, which strongly supported Article 9's prohibition on military forces. They also needed to be sensitive to the tenuous political position of Prime Minister Yoshida's party in any diplomatic effort to pressure the Japanese. United States troop redeployments necessitated by the budgetary imperatives in Eisenhower's strategy further impeded American efforts to hasten the pace of Japanese rearmament. During the 1950s the JCS insisted that Japan needed to create an army of 348,000 to ward off raids and maintain internal security. Eisenhower appears to have regarded this figure as unrealistic. On at least two occasions, one in 1955 the other 1957, the administration embarrassed its officials in Japan by declaring its intent to withdraw American forces although the Japanese had not met the desired troop levels. Following the second episode, the American commander in Japan complained that Washington was undermining his efforts to prod the Japanese into increasing their ground forces. How could he convince the Japanese that such a move was necessary, he asked, if the Pentagon believed it was safe to withdraw its own troops whenever it saw fit?²⁷

As these incidents suggest, during the Eisenhower administration, some American officials, including the president, were moving toward de facto agreement with one of the main assumptions of Prime Minister Yoshida's defense policy: Japan was not threatened by invasion. It followed from that assumption that Japan could make its biggest contribution to the anti-communist coalition by building a healthy economy.²⁸

By the mid-1950's American strategy was defensive, concentrating on keeping Japan tied to the West. Gradually the daily management of the alliance produced an uneasy dynamic where diplomats mediated between American military officers and the Japanese government. As one American diplomat recalled, reaching compromise between the United States and

²⁶ Watson, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 241-243.

²⁷ Memorandum from Hoover to Dulles, 19 July 1955, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, xxiii, Part 1, *Japan* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 75-76. (hereafter cited as *FRUS* and volume). Commander-in-Chief Far East to JCS, 18 January 1957, CCS 092 Japan (12-12-50), sec. 22, RG 218, Geographic File, NA.

²⁸ H.W. Brands, Jr., "The United States and the Reemergence of Independent Japan," *Pacific Affairs* (Fall 1986), 59:3, 396.

Japan on base rights and other issues was a “difficult process involving strong emotions on both sides and a constant effort to balance the political realities in Japan with U.S. strategic requirements in Asia.”²⁹ For the State Department, reducing the profile of military forces, in effect ending the state of dominion exercised by the Americans, seemed the best way to ensure Japanese cooperation. Japan’s economic stability counted for more than its military potential.

Americans obtained confidential information showing that the Japanese government saw the relationship developing the same way. In August 1955, a Korean diplomat gave the American embassy in Tokyo a copy of a dispatch from the Japanese embassy in Washington to the Foreign Ministry. According to the purloined message, Japanese diplomats in Washington identified American policy as “negative, designed to keep Japan out of Communist hands.” The Washington embassy reported that because Japanese matters were less urgent than others in Asia, Japan policy was formulated by working level officials in the American government, “particularly military.” “Thus military considerations carry more weight than political in Japan policy.” But, according to the Japanese, economically, the Americans were beginning to realize “the difficulty of Japan’s position, and to realize that stabilization will be slow.” Consequently, “USA will try to make maximum possible concessions to Japanese within present treaty framework and considerations of remainder of Far Eastern policy.” The message went on to predict a drawdown of American ground forces and commensurate improvements in air defenses.³⁰

Japan remained important to the JCS in the 1950s, but in keeping with the priorities of the New Look, the emphasis was on deterrence. If deterrence failed, the main objective would be denying control of the home islands to the enemy. As noted, in the event of war with the Soviet Union, plans called for the withdrawal of troops from South Korea and the establishment of defensive positions on the offshore island chain. Tactical air power would defend the approaches to islands. The navy also shifted to a defensive posture. Increases in Soviet air power in the Far East made the offensive operations of the pre-Korean War maritime strategy less practical. The number of carriers in the Western Pacific was also reduced after the armistice. Of the seven carriers assigned to that region, four were designated for transfer to other theaters in the event of a general war.³¹ Instead of massing for an assault on Soviet airfields and submarine pens, the navy’s main task in the first weeks of a general war would be to guard Japan’s Sea Lines of Communication. Within this defensive scheme, the JCS planned for increasing cooperation with the newly formed Self-Defense Forces (1954). American naval forces provided their Japanese counterparts with their most sophisticated technology for tracking submarines. As one participant in this program explained, such close collaboration was easier for the US Navy because it “operated over the horizon” and away from public

²⁹ The quotation is from Richard L. Sneider, “U.S. - Japanese Security Relations: A Historical Perspective,” (Occasional Papers of the East Asian Research Institute, Columbia University, New York, NY, 1982), 25; Swenson-Wright, *Unequal Allies?*, 202, 238-239.

³⁰ Memorandum, 8/23/1955, translation of Japanese diplomatic cable re U.S. policy toward Japan obtained by CIA, NSA #78372.

³¹ Study of Attack Carrier Force levels, October 1953, A-4, box 286, 1953, OP-30S, Strategic Plans Division, NHC.

scrutiny.³²

Cooperation in coastal and air defense proceeded more smoothly than efforts to rebuild the ground forces, but here too the Americans encountered difficulties. To meet the threat of Soviet-Chinese air power in Northeast Asia, the JCS countered with Nike anti-aircraft missiles and new jet aircraft. To accommodate this new weaponry, the Americans needed to obtain more land around existing bases. Each new intrusion into Japanese farmland for runway extensions and launch sites provoked protests, picketing, and rallies by irate farmers and opponents of the alliance. American commanders, frustrated by public opposition to the base improvements, complained bitterly about the Japanese government's tepid statements accepting but not supporting the acquisitions.³³

By 1955, American diplomats had grown concerned that the accumulating friction over basing rights and Japanese rearmament was threatening the alliance. The specter of Japanese neutralism had haunted American policymakers from the moment Japan regained its independence. In 1952, as will be recalled, the authors NSC 125 only felt confident enough to predict that Japan would remain in the Western camp for the next two years. A year later, following the death of Stalin, the State Department's intelligence office warned that the armistice in Korea and the subsequent moderating in Soviet policies, might lure wavering states in the Free World into letting down their guard. The report noted in passing an implicit paradox of Eisenhower administration's New Look when it observed that "The levelling off of the US's own rearmament effort and the decline in many of its foreign aid programs also lessens the sense of urgency abroad." Nevertheless, the report predicted that for at least the next two years Japan would retain its pro-Western orientation. The authors cautioned, however, that anti-American sentiment in Japan was growing to the point that it could weaken the ruling conservative coalition and create more friction in the alliance.³⁴ Shortly after this study was completed, Dulles privately complained that he was "terribly disappointed in the way things have been going in Japan." "There has not been any rebirth of moral strength as in the case of Germany," he added.³⁵ In late 1954, General Van Fleet bluntly warned that "the greatest danger faced in Japan is a growth of the spirit of neutralism based on the Japanese conviction that we are losing the war in Asia."³⁶

Van Fleet was not alone among military officers in believing that regional developments contributed to Japanese neutralism. These officers called for a more assertive American

³² James Kelly, Comments at East-West Center for the "The U.S.-Japan Project: Diplomatic, Security, and Economic Relations Since 1960" sponsored by the National Security Archive, June 1999, Honolulu, Hawaii.

³³ Marc Gallicchio, "The Best Defense is a Good Offense: The Evolution of American Strategy in East Asia, 1953-1960," in Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye, eds. *The Great Powers in East Asia, 1953-1960* (New York, 1990), 70-72; Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 168-190.

³⁴ NIE-99, Estimate of the World Situation Through 1955, 23 October 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954, National Security Affairs*, II, Part 1, 551-562.

³⁵ Dulles to Rusk, December 29, 1953, folder # 1, Chronological File, John Foster Dulles Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

³⁶ Report of the Van Fleet mission to the Far East, Chapter 5: U.S. Position in the Far East: An Appreciation. White House, 26 April-7 August 1954. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349248878/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=14.

military policy in Asia to reverse the Red tide. They argued that the pattern of retreat had begun when the United Nations failed to attack the PRC during the Korean War. The trend continued in 1953 with the armistice ending the Korean War, which many military officers considered a defeat, and was followed a year later by Eisenhower's refusal to come to the aid of the French at Dienbienphu. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Robert Carney added the outcome of the first Taiwan Straits crisis to that list because the United States had forced Chiang to withdraw some of his forces from the most exposed positions on the offshore islands. Overall, these officers believed that the United States needed to regain the initiative in Asia. "We need a victory," Carney insisted.³⁷

Senior military officers floated numerous proposals for reversing the Red tide in Asia. General Hull and the head of the military mission in Taiwan recommended using a portion of Chiang's forces as a strategic reserve to meet emergencies elsewhere in the region. Admiral Felix Stump, Commander-in-Chief Pacific, sought to increase the size and tempo of Nationalist raids on the mainland as a means of wresting the military and psychological initiative from the communists and maintaining the "offensive spirit" of Chiang's forces.³⁸ In June 1954, Van Fleet saw the impending communist victory in Indochina as an opportunity to create a semblance of the collective security organization he believed the region desperately needed. The general urged Washington to approve Rhee's offer to send two ROK divisions to aid the French in their battle against the Vietminh. He added that if the United States went ahead with the plan, it would be advisable to send at least one Chinese Nationalist division and token forces from the Philippines and, if necessary, a US marine division to hold Haiphong for the arrival of the proposed international expeditionary force.³⁹

Eisenhower ignored Van Fleet's recommendation, but military officers persisted in recommending operations to combat the advance of communist forces in Asia. In February 1955, General Earle E. Partridge, Commander of the Far Eastern Air Force, proposed a scheme for luring Chinese Communist aircraft into combat over Japan as a way of impressing world opinion. General Nathan Twining, the Air Force Chief of Staff glumly told Partridge that he could not approve the plan because "the tide of opinion" in Washington was against provocative action. "Even the most elementary defensive measures," he lamented, "are sometimes labeled as evidence of a plan to initiate preventive war."⁴⁰

Despite pressure from his more offensively-minded senior officers, Eisenhower remained committed to a defensive posture in Asia that minimized the risks of drawing the United States into conflicts on the mainland. In keeping with that low-cost strategy, the president continued to view Japan's economic recovery as a more pressing need than rearmament. To facilitate Japan's recovery, the president patiently maneuvered between bureaucratic obstacles

³⁷ "Report of the Van Fleet Mission, Chapter Five, U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349248878/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=14; Presentation, Adm. Arthur W. Radford, Chairman, to the National War College; 24 January 1955. Department Of Defense, 24 Jan. 1955. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349427814/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=16; Gallicchio, "The Best Defense," 72-73.

³⁸ Gallicchio, "The Best Defense," 72-73.

³⁹ Van Fleet to Radford, June 1954, in Van Fleet Report, Chapter Five.

⁴⁰ Gallicchio, "The Best Defense," 73.

to improve Japan's trading opportunities. Eisenhower eased restrictions on Japan's trade with China, won Japan's admission into GATT, and wherever possible lowered barriers to Japanese goods in the United States.⁴¹ In doing so he overrode opposition from the JCS, who predicted that Japan's example would lead to a slackening of anti-communist resolve throughout Asia, and from Congress, which feared Japanese competition with domestic textile manufactures.

Predictably, National Security Council papers echoed the president's priorities. Taking the earlier NSC 125 paper on "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Japan," as a starting point, the National Security Council, with Eisenhower's approval, prepared a completely new study (NSC 5516/1) that according to one participant embodied "a major change in emphasis and approach."⁴² The NSC 125 studies were intended to cover US-Japan relations for the immediate period following the end of the occupation. The new study, labeled a "Progress Report" assessed the extent to which the United States had achieved its goals over the last three years and offered recommendations for improving the relationship. The study distilled America's objectives in Japan into three categories: political stability and effective government, development of economic strength, and an adequate defense capability. As far as the accomplishment of those objectives went, the NSC offered a glass-half-full appraisal. Japan was rearming but not quickly enough. The pro-American conservative coalition remained in power, but the left was building strength while the conservatives remained riven by factionalism. The slow pace of economic development stood out as the most important problem, especially because it impeded the achievement of the other two objectives. Nevertheless, the overall tenor of the study was to advocate a more patient attitude on the part of the United States accompanied by a concerted effort to deal with Japan as an equal partner.⁴³

Underpinning this new approach was a general feeling that although progress remained slower than desired, the relationship would remain stable for the foreseeable future. The new study anticipated difficulties ahead, but nothing beyond the capacity of diplomacy to resolve. Japan would try to expand trade with the PRC, opposition to the expansion of military bases was not fading, and there was no prospect of the Japanese participating in a collective security organization, even if Korea and the Philippines were willing to accept them, which they were not. In short, unlike their military counterparts, the authors of the NSC paper believed that the "basis of Japan's alignment with the West remains firm."⁴⁴

When it came to Japan's relations with Korea the NSC's progress report offered a starkly pessimistic assessment. "Despite the United States efforts," it read, "Japanese-ROK relations

⁴¹ Qing Simei, "The Eisenhower Administration and Changes in Western Embargo Policy Against China, 1954-1958, in Cohen and Iriye, eds. *The Great Powers in East Asia*, 133-134.

⁴² Swenson-Wright, *Unequal Allies?*, 127.

⁴³ The American ambassador in Tokyo submitted a strong endorsement of a more patient approach to Japan. Ambassador Allison to State Department, 2 February 1955, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Japan*, Volume 23, Part 1, 17-19; NSC 5516/1, Memo from Elmer B. Staats to James S. Lay, Jr. includes a progress report on Japan, including U.S. military and economic assistance figures. White House, 20 Oct. 1955. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349114425/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=1.

⁴⁴ NSC 5516/1, Memo from Elmer B. Staats to James S. Lay, Jr. includes a progress report on Japan, including U.S. military and economic assistance figures. White House, 20 Oct. 1955. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349114425/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=1.

remained strained and will continue to remain a difficult problem.”⁴⁵ Conditions had improved from the immediate postwar years when the US Navy had to protect Japanese fishing vessels from what official documents described as Korean “pirates,” but there was no gainsaying the fierce animosity between the two countries. Korean hostility towards Japan was thoroughly understandable from a historic perspective but that knowledge did not console American aid administrators who were trying to stretch limited foreign aid dollars in Asia.⁴⁶ Korea’s “refusal to do business with Japan” was one of the “sorest points” of friction between American aid workers and the Korean government. The Korean refusal to sell rice to Japan or purchase fertilizer and spare parts from that country was seriously hampering development. Perhaps of equal importance, aid administrators complained that if the Koreans availed themselves of Japanese technical assistance, it would save the American taxpayers money.⁴⁷

No matter how wasteful the Rhee government’s policies were, there was little likelihood of the United States abandoning the Republic of Korea. As a report from the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Command explained, America’s commitment to South Korea had “arisen out of a series of historical events whose consequences could not have been foreseen.” The United States had no significant economic interest on the Korean peninsula; its stake in the survival of the ROK was measured in less tangible terms. The loss or abandonment of South Korea, according to the report, would “injure the prestige of the United States and weaken its influence in this vital region.”⁴⁸ In other words, concerns over regional security, extending beyond the peninsula, kept the United States committed to Korea despite the numerous ways in which Rhee’s volatile nationalism conflicted with American objectives.

By the mid-1950s the ROK’s military potential was the most tangible benefit the United States had derived from its costly involvement on the peninsula. A Joint Chiefs study advised that “Korea must be looked on as our ‘force’ in the Far East while no significant increase in support of U.S. objectives can be expected, we will be required to maintain Korean armed forces in sufficient strength to deter another communist attack against them.”⁴⁹ In the years after the armistice the United States had built the Korean ground forces, consisting of twenty battle-tested divisions, into the world’s fourth largest army. Even here, however, one could detect the growing frustration among American military advisors in Korea. As will be recalled,

⁴⁵ NSC 5516/1, Memo from Elmer B. Staats to James S. Lay, Jr. includes a progress report on Japan, including U.S. military and economic assistance figures. White House, 20 Oct. 1955. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349114425/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=1.

⁴⁶ The Japanese government’s continuing discrimination against Koreans in Japan was another source of friction between the two countries. Richard Finn, *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and Postwar Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 238-239.

⁴⁷ Text of a news report by *Christian Science Monitor* correspondent Gordon Walker concerning U.S. aid efforts in South Korea. Department Of State, 27 Sept. 1955. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349598978/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=2.

⁴⁸ Status report on military and economic situation in South Korea and Japan; U.S. assistance discussed. Department Of Defense, 1 Feb. 1957. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349448209/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=3.

⁴⁹ Joint Strategic Survey Committee to Radford, 22 March 1956, Chairman JCS 381 Military Strategy and Posture, Record Group 218, Chairman’s Files, MMRB, NA; Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 97.

in 1954, Rhee had agreed to reduce his standing army to sixteen active divisions as enlistments expired and active-duty soldiers entered the reserves. Nevertheless, by 1957, the ROK army still fielded twenty active-duty divisions. There was no prospect, moreover, of achieving the desired reduction in the 1958 fiscal year because of a shortage of facilities for the reserves.⁵⁰

Japan-ROK cooperation appeared unlikely in the foreseeable future. American officials continued to include boilerplate language in their reports that emphasized the importance of normalized relations between Korea and Japan, but they offered no advice on how the United States could achieve that goal.⁵¹ In the absence of any rapprochement between the two US allies, American policy towards Korea and Japan would continue to move on two separate tracks. That unfortunate situation was, to paraphrase the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Command, the outcome of a series of historical events, beginning with the American occupation of southern Korea in 1945, whose consequences were not foreseen.

⁵⁰ At the behest of the secretary of the treasury, the CINCFE and American ambassador in Seoul were instructed to gain Rhee's commitment to demobilize four divisions. There was, however, no explanation of how the reduction would be accomplished without the required facilities. Summary of a National Security Council meeting regarding U.S. military supply policy toward South Korea. National Security Council, 13 June 1957. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349162337/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=1. See also Status report on military and economic situation in South Korea and Japan; U.S. assistance discussed. Department Of Defense, 1 Feb. 1957. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349448209/USDD?u=vill_main&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=3

⁵¹ For example, The US should "Encourage the ROK to take the necessary steps toward normal commercial relations with other Free World countries, particularly Japan." NSC 5702/2, 9 August 9, 1957, NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD KOREA, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Korea*, Volume 23, Part 2, 490-498.