

National Security Strategy: Korean War (1950-1953) and Asymmetric Warfare

Professor Branislav L. Slantchev

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Overview We study the Korean War: its origins, conduct, and conclusion. This was one of the most significant conflicts during the Cold War. It was the only serious attempt to expand communism through military means, and the U.S. was successful in containing it, which may have discouraged future adventures of the sort. On the other hand, it also set the stage for U.S. policy that ended up encouraging other regional adversaries to try their luck. We investigate the two main schools of thought on the “proper” use of force— the Never Again and Limited War schools—and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

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1 The Korean War

On June 25, 1950, North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) invaded South Korea (Republic of Korea, ROK). This was a defining moment in the Cold War. Truman treated it as naked Communist aggression, a Soviet probe of how far they could press the US for advantages. This was a new and dangerous development for it marked the first Communist attempt to expand through military means into a neighboring state since 1945. Truman thought this required a vigorous response, so he gave the go-ahead for a massive rearmament of the US, committed fully to the defense of Taiwan (which is where Chiang had fled to establish the Republic of China), supported the French in Indochina, moved to solidify NATO, and finally to rearm West Germany. He was following the spirit of NSC-68, whose implementation he authorized in September.

1.1 Chronology of Events

1.2 Origins of the War

What were the origins of the Korean War? Was the administration right in its assessment? The obvious facts were plain. In 1945, the Big Three conferred at Potsdam and the question of Korea came up (Korea had been a Japanese colony since the turn of the century). Churchill, fearful that the US and the Soviet Union would dismantle Britain's overseas empire, didn't want to discuss the issue and had it turned over to the ministers. On August 14, though, Stalin agreed with no discussion to divide Korea between the Soviet Union and the United States. He immediately ordered the rapidly advancing Red Army to halt at the 38th parallel, which it promptly did even though the Americans would not show up there until the end of September. If Stalin had territorial ambitions, he did not seize a great opportunity. In fact, recently declassified material shows that from February 1945 to April 1950 Stalin did not want control of the entire peninsula.

Instead, he pursued pre-1905 (Russo-Japanese War) strategies aimed at preventing any single power from dominating Korea. Russia, you should recall, failed to stop Japan from doing so but Japan had the backing of the US, Britain, and Germany at the time. It was different now, although Stalin continued to regard Japan as the primary threat in the region as late as 1950. In seeking to establish a "balance of power," he agreed in September 1945 to a joint administration of Korea (details finalized in December). The SU and US would establish a provisional democratic government in Korea, which (together with a joint US-SU commission) would work out a 5-year 4-power trusteeship over the country (SU, US, GB, China).

Immediately upon reaching the 38th parallel, the Red Army sealed the passage to/from the South. This was done because the USSR was hoping to extract "war booty" from the North and wanted to prevent "goodies" from going South. They did

8/14/45	Stalin agrees to divide Korea with US at 38th parallel
12/45-1/46	Moscow agreement between USSR/US
1/46	Koreans protest, Stalin orders KCP to support agreement
5/10/48	UN-sponsored elections in South Korea, Rhee president
6/48	China begins final offensive to finish off Chiang
8/15/48	ROK formally established in the South
9/9/48	DPRK established in the North under Kim Il Sung
10/19/48	regiments in ROK army mutiny against Rhee, but are suppressed
1/13/50	USSR boycott UN in protest of refusal to give Chiang's seat to Mao
4/50	Kim presents Stalin with unification plans, Stalin OKs
6/25/50	DPRK invades ROK, by 9/15 ROK/UN troops only at "Pusan Perimeter"
6/27/50	UNSC brands DPRK as aggressor
6/30/50	Truman, without notifying Congress, authorizes troops in Korea
8/50	Stalin refuses the involve USSR; US ignores Chinese warnings
9/15/50	MacArthur lands at Inchon, cutting DPRK armies in two
9/27/50	Truman permits move across North Korea unless Chinese resist
10/7/50	UN endorses the unification of Korea
11/24/50	UN/US forces reach the Yalu River (border of DPRK with China)
11/26/50	China attacks in force, drives US troops back across 38th parallel
12/50-1/51	Truman submits \$50 billion defense budget; US counter-offensive
3/14/51	US recaptures Seoul, front stalemated along the 38th parallel
4/11/51	Truman summarily dismisses MacArthur
10/24/52	Eisenhower pledges, "I shall go to Korea"; wins presidency
12/14/52	Eisenhower warns US would use nukes unless war ends
1/53	Eisenhower threatens to "unleash Chiang"; scares Britain and France
3/5/53	Stalin dies; Malenkov and Khrushchev oust Beria; USSR moderates
4/23/53	talks resume in Korea
7/27/53	Panmunjom armistice divides country at 38th parallel; unification fails

not stop the movement of people, and so about 1.6 million crossed into the South (1 million from Manchuria, where they had been put in forced labor camps by the Japanese, and the rest from North Korea, fleeing communism).

Now, the Central Committee of the Korean Communist Party was based in Seoul (South Korea) and it repeatedly requested help from Moscow for organizational purposes but especially for convincing the occupying Americans to allow the KCP to operate legally. In 1945, the Korean communists were very strong and the US policies were quite unpopular. Of all countries at the periphery, Korea offered the best changes for an indigenous communist victory.

The Soviet Union had moved quickly in the North with propaganda, and the indigenous communists aided by the experienced Soviet apparatus as they organized politically the area creating Soviet-style social and political structures. Very tellingly then, Stalin refused to meddle in the South. Not only did he reject the KCP's pleas for help, but the Soviet command instructed party members in the

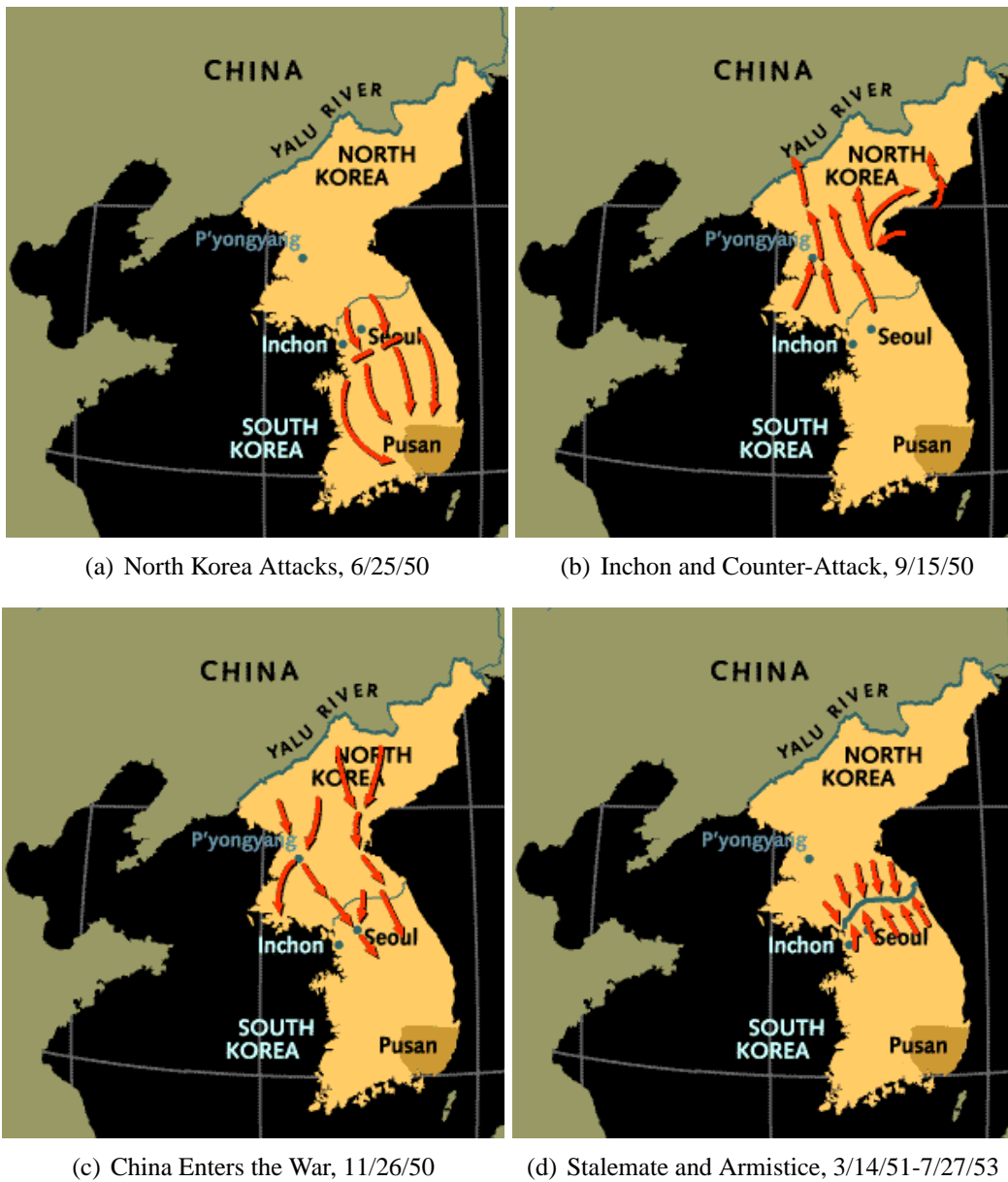


Figure 1: The Stages of the Korean War (Courtesy of PBS).

South to cooperate with the Americans. Here's what Stalin argued: the "correct strategic line can take place only through a correct understanding of the international position of Korea [...] The ideals of the US, the leader of capitalism, and the Soviet Union, the fatherland of the proletariat, are to be expressed in Korea without contradiction." Yes, it is as bewildering as it sounds.

Stalin's attempt to prevent any single power from dominating Korea, however, soon exposed the impossibility of doing so while simultaneously creating a uni-

fied country. The occupational forces were hostile to each other from the very beginning. While the Soviets wanted to eliminate Japanese presence there entirely (because they saw Japan as the primary threat), the US not only kept the old administrative apparatus in place but retained top Japanese and local collaborators in many important posts. Syngman Rhee (the South Korean leader) was on record as extremely anti-Soviet. Despite these problems, the USSR realized it was not possible to oppose the creation of a unified Korea directly and so it resolved to undermine it indirectly. To this end, the USSR agreed to the trusteeship idea.

In January 1946, the Koreans learned the outcome of the Moscow conference. There was immediate and widespread outrage. For Koreans, “trusteeship” was equivalent to “colony” (Japan had taken the land in 1905 under such a name). Korea had been betrayed! In the North, the tight Soviet command organized demonstrations in support of the agreement, but in the South, thousands took to the streets. The Soviets ordered the KCP to support the idea, and the Party obeyed, becoming the single political unit to do so despite having consistently opposed it before on grounds of nationalism.

Since the KCP was the only political party to support the Moscow agreement, SU saw a way out of its dilemma in Korea. The Russians began to insist that in the preparations for the elections for a provisional government (as per Moscow conference), only parties that supported the agreement would be consulted. This was not an unreasonable position, but the US opposed it because it saw correctly that this would imply that only communists would participate in the formation of the provisional government. The Joint Commission adjourned without agreement.

It appeared to be a perfect solution: The Soviets could maintain a division of the country, control over resources in the North, and still claim that the USSR was the true defender of the agreement with the US. But the Soviet policy had a fatal flaw: it ignored the Korean communists who were also fervent nationalists. As usual, nationalism tended to trump communism when the two made conflicting demands on loyalty. This was not a distinctly American blind spot—the Russians often got carried away with their own propaganda line.

At any rate, the success of Soviet plans had disgraced the KCP in the South, while creating a division that communists in the North bitterly resented. The Koreans did not want the division—it was artificially imposed by the two superpowers who could not agree how to cooperate on unifying the country.

While Stalin was not interested in expanding his control over entire Korea, the North Korean communists were quite determined to unify the country under their control. Kim Il Sung (North Korean leader) repeatedly urged Stalin to work for unification under the provisions of the Moscow declaration, which the Soviet Union ostensibly supported and because of which it was maintaining the division. The more Stalin pulled back his support, the more likely were the North Korean communists to try to solve the situation by themselves.

Because much of what Stalin wanted from North Korea could be had without

expensive occupation, he proposed an immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea in September 1947. The Red Army left North Korea by the end of 1948, only military advisors and a limited number of other personnel was left behind. In March 1949, the Soviet Union concluded 11 agreements with the newly created DPRK, all of them economic, mostly dealing with trade. The Soviet Union continued to supply DPRK with arms, and North Korea paid in gold and goods (i.e. this was not aid, this was trade). In all this, the Soviets tried to keep tabs on the nationalistic aspirations of the North Koreans and they did attempt to control events there.

The North Koreans developed their own unification plans, and in April 1950 Stalin abruptly reversed his policy by approving them in a meeting with Kim Il Sung. The initiative had clearly come from the Koreans and Stalin agreed only after having been reassured that the US would not intervene. Stalin quickly supported the DPRK military (along with China) and at the time of the invasion, North Korea had a clear significant superiority over the South. The planning officers thought the campaign would take 22-27 days to complete. The Koreans waited for all the help to arrive before launching the offensive.

Stalin, who had been reassured that the war would be over quickly and that the US would not have the time to intervene, appears to have been surprised at the vigorous moves the US took in response to the aggressors. The Soviets immediately took steps to avoid military confrontation with the US over Korea: ships were ordered to stay clear of the war zone, Soviet citizens were not allowed to join the war. Stalin was so reluctant to provoke the US that he even refused to intervene to save DPRK after the war turned badly for it. He even reneged on the mutual defense treaty with Mao and refused to provide air support for the crossing of the Yalu. Only in 1951 did he send Soviet pilots under extreme secrecy; these did fight in the war.

Was Truman justified in his thinking? The traditional line of thought consistent with the official position at the time is that Stalin orchestrated and initiated the attack in an attempt to probe Western defenses. As we saw, the exact opposite was true: Stalin approved the Korean initiative only after he was persuaded the US would not intervene. The revisionist account claims Stalin had no control of DPRK. It is only partially true. Why did Stalin risk it?

The major problem were the Koreans themselves. There was no doubt they wanted to unify the country. The DPRK wanted to establish communist control, and ROK often declared itself ready and determined to unify the country by military means. There was skirmishing between troops from both sides along the 38th parallel already. There was a window of opportunity that could be used.

However, this was not what tipped the scales. It was the fragile relationship between USSR and China that finally moved Stalin to OK the invasion. As we saw, since the mid 1920s Stalin's policies toward the CCP were designed to hinder it instead of helping. Still, Mao had won all by himself and had charged Stalin with hindering the revolutionary cause in Asia. Should Kim achieve the same without

Soviet support, Stalin's authority in the communist world would plummet as the same charges reappear and as Mao's position strengthened.

Still, Stalin's worst fear was that China would not willingly ally itself with the USSR for long. Mao had turned to Moscow out of necessity because the US refused to talk to him. But what would happen if the US reconsidered its position? Stalin knew he could never outbid the US for aid (even the pact he had with PRC from February 1950 was stingy and unfavorable to the Chinese). Mao had excellent political and economic reasons for turning away from the alliance with the USSR. Stalin's overriding objective was to prevent the emergence of a strong communist state in East Asia independent of the control of the Soviet Union.

Stalin calculated that if the US lost ROK, it would not allow itself to lose more, and would therefore commit fully to Taiwan's defense. This would prevent rapprochement between the US and PRC, and will have Mao facing a renewed civil war. This would force Mao to continue to rely on the Soviet Union for economic and political help, and so will render PRC dependent on, and therefore controllable by, the Soviet Union. This was the final straw that moved Stalin to act.

The US both frustrated and fulfilled his plans. Defying Stalin's (and Kim's, and Mao's) calculations, the US responded with speed, determination, and force that surprised many. Although everyone knew for at least a year that war in Korea was imminent because both sides were determined to unify it under their respective rule, the US had refused to supply Syngman Rhee with offensive weapons out of concern that he might use them to launch an invasion of the North. The bloody civil conflict raged nevertheless, claiming over 100,000 lives after 1946 and before the beginning of the war in 1950. Most of the attacks since 1949 (when the two nations became independent) came from the South.

The war was a struggle between left-wing and right-wing Koreans but to an outsider unfamiliar with the tricky inter-communist diplomacy, it looked like a communist aggression. With this assumption in mind, Truman ordered supplies to South Korea, and moved the 7th Fleet between China and Taiwan. He called a session of the UN Security Council and got a resolution branding DPRK as the aggressor, demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal across the 38th parallel. The resolution passed because the Soviet Union was at the time boycotting the Security Council (since January 13) because of the UN's refusal to give Chiang's seat to Red China. The same day, the UN passed a resolution recommending that its members aid ROK in restoring the peace. The Soviet delegate still had not appeared—the speed of the US reaction had taken them by surprise.

Truman talked to some congressmen after his actions but did not seek Congressional approval for his momentous decision to send American ground troops to Korea. On June 30, Truman concluded that because of the heavy losses the 65,000 strong ROK army was suffering, direct military action was required.

The US frustrated the hope for a quick victory with no US intervention. On the other hand, equating nationalist communism with Soviet-directed communist

expansion caused Truman to commit to Chiang, so Stalin's major goal was fulfilled. The US action made accommodation between PRC and America unlikely, and so Mao was driven further into Soviet arms. Indeed, by the end of October, China was at war with America on terms that did not activate PRC's defense treaty with the USSR. This was better than anything Stalin could have hoped for.

1.3 Summary of Opponents

- DPRK: Kim Il Sung and all Korean communists want to unify the country, might do so even without Soviet support
- ROK: Syngman Rhee wants to unify Korea under his rule;
- battles with North between 1946-50 claim lives of over 100,000 Koreans
- USSR: Stalin fears Kim might go ahead without Soviet support/control but with Mao's; if Kim wins, Stalin exposed for not supporting revolution in Asia and Mao gains influence. Most fearful of accommodation between China and US. Stalin also fears US intervention, does not OK DPRK invasion until reassured US won't intervene. Finally agrees because he believes (a) DPRK has good chances for success, (b) US won't intervene, (c) if US loses ROK, it won't stand to lose Taiwan. Because of (c), Mao will be forced into Soviet arms.
- US: "defensive perimeter" excludes Korea but Acheson still makes clear UN will react to aggression; Truman believes Kim is Stalin's puppet; response commits US *both* to Korean War *and* defense of Taiwan.
- China: supports DPRK because of reasonable chances of success, wants to use Kim's regime to control region; warns US not to cross 38th parallel or commit to Taiwan.

Conclusions:

1. Korean War result of civil conflict between Kim and Rhee for control over entire country;
2. DPRK invasion was Korean initiative which Stalin and Mao supported, both believing US would not intervene
3. US response frustrates and fulfills Stalin's plans: the US does intervene but it also commits to Taiwan, driving Mao firmly into the Soviet camp.

1.4 American Response

By August Stalin had refused to let the USSR be dragged into the war one way or another claiming it was a civil war. The US administration thought the Russians were afraid of the nukes (true) and ignored China because it believed Stalin controlled Mao (false).

Whatever the dubious merits of the American interpretation of Soviet motives, the Truman administration fashioned a global response: strengthening of NATO, commitment of ground troops to Western Europe (as per NSC-68), the rearmament of Germany, and a UN-sponsored but US-led military action to help the South Koreans repel the Northern invaders.

The South desperately needed all help it could get. Within weeks of the attack, the Northern armies, well stocked and supplied by USSR and China, made lightning progress, sweeping before them the rather feeble defenders. By mid September, only the small area around the city of Pusan (the Pusan Perimeter) in the Southeast corner was still in South Korean hands.

On September 15, 1950 General Douglas MacArthur made a brilliant landing at Inchon, close to Seoul, splitting the advancing North Korean army in the middle and reversing the tide of war. The US/UN forces began pushing the North Koreans back, driving toward the Yalu River that marked the border of North Korea and China. On September 27, Truman permitted the move across North Korea unless Chinese resistance was encountered. The UN endorsed the presidential directive on October 7. The war of liberation had turned into a war of conquest and unification on South Korean terms. All eyes were now on China.

1.5 China Enters the War

In late September China warned that it would attack if US troops moved into North Korea. Mao was egged on to fight by Stalin, Truman's decision to protect Taiwan, and the desire to keep American influence away from China's borders. By November 24, MacArthur had reached the Yalu, working under the plans to reconstruct all of Korea that he and Truman discussed during the October conference on Wake Island.

On November 26, the Chinese attacked in force across the Yalu, destroying large numbers of US troops. In 3 weeks, they crossed the 38th parallel and announced themselves intending to unify Korea. Seoul fell. Despite trying to reassure China that the US had no aggressive designs, Truman realized that the war with China was the only way to push through Congress the enormous defense budgets NSC-68 envisioned. The decision to cross the 38th parallel was made mostly for domestic reasons. It was exceptionally costly: over 4/5s of US casualties occurred after that. In December/January Truman submitted a \$50 billion defense budget (in contrast to \$13.5 billion barely 6 months earlier) and increased Army personnel by 50% to

3.5 million men.

In January 1951, the UN forces began a counter offensive, recaptured Seoul on 3/14 but the battle stalemated along the 38th parallel. The frustrated MacArthur issued an imperious call to the Chinese to surrender, in direct violation of US administration's attempts to open negotiations. The General argued that he had to be allowed to institute a naval blockade of China, bomb Chinese military and industrial installations, "unleash Chiang" from Taiwan, and even possibly use nuclear weapons against the enemy.

Truman's patience was exhausted when a Congressman read a letter from MacArthur in which the general charged that while he is fighting "Europe's war with arms... the diplomats there still fight it with words." The letter urged for complete military victory. Truman had had enough—on April 11, 1951, he summarily dismissed the unruly general.

Offensives were launched by both sides with no success but heavy casualties. The first negotiations broke down in October 1952 over repatriation of prisoners. The war seemed to have no end in sight.

1.6 Eisenhower and Death of Stalin: End of the War

The Republican presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower (of World War II fame) pledged on October 24 "I shall go to Korea," meaning that he intended to terminate the conflict whose resolution had eluded Truman. He and John Foster Dulles, the soon to be Secretary of State, charged "containment is defensive, negative, futile, and immoral (in abandoning) countless human beings to despotism and Godless terrorism."

Eisenhower won the elections, mostly because people believed that he could end the war because he was the only man who was qualified to deal with Stalin. Then, abruptly, everything changed.

On March 5, 1953, Stalin died. In the power struggle following his death, Georgi Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev managed to oust and execute Beria, the most sinister and dangerous of Stalin's cronies. The Soviet line immediately moderated. Malenkov gave a speech, in which he claimed that "at the present time there is no disputed or unresolved question that cannot be settled peacefully by mutual agreement of the interested countries. This applies to our relations with all states, including the USA."

It took some time for the US to respond: many believed that after Stalin's death, the USSR would descend into chaos during the long and painful transition of leadership. This did not happen. Khrushchev, with the backing of the Army, pressured Malenkov into surrendering the key post of First Party Secretary to himself (Malenkov kept the premiership). An uneasy collective began functioning.

In the US, Eisenhower finally responded to Malenkov's overtures with a list of demands: free elections in united Korea, united Germany, free Eastern Europe, all

quite exorbitant given that the US had little to show for it in Korea. This time Churchill attacked the demands and recommended a piecemeal approach instead.

The British (and the French) had been frightened by Eisenhower's December 14, 1952 warning that unless war ended quickly, the US would retaliate under "circumstances of our choosing" and by his first State of the Union message in January 1953 when he threatened to "unleash Chiang." As the tensions mounted, Stalin died.

On April 23, 1953 talks in Korea resumed and on July 27, at Panmunjom, an armistice was signed, accepting a division roughly along the 38th parallel. A formal peace treaty had never been signed and in 1953-1954 reunification talks failed. The US had suffered 37,000 dead and 103,000 wounded.

The Korean War did succeed in checking direct communist aggression and in that sense it was an American victory. However, it also produced the war with the Chinese, which is what Stalin had hoped for.

2 The Lessons of Asymmetric Warfare

Asymmetric warfare refers to conflicts in which a weaker side engages a much stronger opponent. Although it is not clear that the Korean War was such a conflict (at first, DPRK had an overwhelming force against ROK, then U.S.-led UN/ROK forces were clearly much stronger, but the scales tipped again with China's entry), the war was a fertile source of data and examples analysts could use to formulate policies.

2.1 Never Again School: Massive Use of Force

Foreign policy analysts drew two different lessons from the Korean War. The **Never Again** school argued that the U.S. should never fight such an inconclusive engagement again, an American entry into a war should be an all or nothing proposition, as General MacArthur argued. The country should be thoroughly prepared to win, and would spare no effort to achieve military victory. If it is not, then it should not intervene at all.

This view dominated Eisenhower's foreign policy and prevented the U.S. from intervening in two significant conflicts. First, the French were losing the war in Indochina where they were fighting nationalists and communists led by Ho Chi Minh. In 1954, the Vietminh surrounded the French forces at Dien Bien Phu and defeat seemed imminent. The U.S. administration agreed that vital American interests were at stake should the communists prevail (the Domino Theory again) and Red China's influence spreads throughout Asia. The French asked, and some military specialists agreed, that the U.S. should use nuclear weapons to save them. But Ike demurred. He had concluded that an air war would not be sufficient to win the conflict and asked for a cost estimate of a ground war. The estimate came back and said that although the U.S. would probably win such a war, the costs would exceed

those of the Korean War by a wide margin. Ike rejected intervention and resolved to deal with the imminent French defeat by diplomatic means.

The military requested authorization for use of nuclear weapons in two other conflicts. In the 1958 Quemoy Islands crisis when a Chinese invasion of the archipelago administered by Taiwan seemed imminent, the military asked (but was denied) to be allowed to use tactical nukes to defeat an invasion. Similarly, in 1961-62 when Kennedy asked for options in case his Laos policy failed, the military came back with nukes again because they believed that an intervention there would escalate into a war with China.

The Never Again school has been quite influential over time and was reflected in the Powell Doctrine that guided U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s until the current administration came to power. We shall have an occasion to discuss this later on.

2.2 Limited War School: Controlled Conflicts

The **Limited War** school drew the opposite conclusion. In an age of thermonuclear weapons, an all-out assault may not be feasible because the defender can have a credible threat to retaliate, especially if that enemy is itself a nuclear power or is protected by one. On the other hand, as Korea demonstrated, when U.S. interests are at stake, the country may need to intervene against regional adversaries. Because an all-out war was out of the question (or had to be avoided in any case), the U.S. would have to fight such wars with means well short of full scale war. Hence, because America had to limit its means of using force, it would have to limit its objectives as well.

The theory of limited war developed as the U.S. faced an ever-increasing nuclear deterrent capability of the Soviets. When Mutually Assured Destruction became the order of day and rendered the threat of nuclear retaliation increasingly dubious, analysts evolved two approaches to dealing with the credibility problem. We have seen them both: the threat that leaves something to chance and the threat of gradual, but limited, escalation. Both brinkmanship and limited retaliation tried to bridge the gap between doing too little (capitulating) and doing too much (nuclear war) to exert coercive pressure on the opponent. The first tactic was about manipulating risk, and as we shall see in the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was so dangerous that both states recoiled from its use in such situations.

The strategy of limited retaliation involves inflicting a limited amount of punishment and sparing many of the opponent's valuable resources to hold them hostages against future punishment. This turns war into a more explicit, though it still may remain tacit, bargaining process. It is a delicate balance for one must inflict enough damage on the opponent to make the prospect of continued fighting sufficiently unpleasant but at the same time not destroy everything he cares for; that is, punish, but do not kill. Presumably, the opponent who is hurting but still has things he cares about would quit before he loses them all. Clearly, the more you increase present

punishment, the less you leave for future threats, which undermines coercion. But the less you destroy now, the more incentive you give the opponent to stay and fight if he does not believe that you would go all the way to the end. You have to signal very credibly that your objectives are limited in order to get him to compromise but on the other hand this may simply encourage him to attempt to outlast you.

In practice, every time the U.S. got involved in fighting during the Cold War, it tended to opt for the limited war strategy, if not explicitly by design, then implicitly by unwillingness to face the costs and risks entailed in an escalation to a massive intervention. As Vietnam demonstrated, coupling unlimited goals with limited means of using force is the worst possible strategy a country may pursue. The high stakes raise the opponent's willingness to resist and suffer punishment, but without the corresponding increase in punishing capability American cannot overcome this added resolve and compel its enemy to capitulate.

As Clausewitz argued back in the 19th century, war is politics and the use of force must be appropriate for the political goals. Military defeat does require an overwhelming use of force; as you should recall, General MacArthur said that "in war there is no substitute for victory." However, military defeat may not be necessary if the demands on the opponent are limited. The enemy may be induced to settle long before it exhausts its fighting capacity if (a) the concessions expected are not too big, and (b) he still has a lot to lose by prolonging the conflict.

2.3 An Appraisal

Which of these two schools would be more useful in increasing crisis stability? It is difficult to say. On one hand, the Never Again approach reduces the probability that the U.S. would intervene, which makes challengers more likely to risk escalation because the U.S. would be expected to back down unless its vital interests are at stake. On the other hand, it increases the probability that once the U.S. commits to fighting, it will fight to the finish, which, given its resources, would mean almost certain defeat for the challenger. This lowers the expected benefit from war for the challenger.

The question then is how risk-taking such potential opponents are. During the Cold War, a regional opponent could ally with the communist powers (especially the Soviet Union) and rely on its nuclear shield in the sense that the USSR would probably not allow the U.S. to get away with using nuclear weapons against its protege. (We shall see that such extensive commitment by the Russians had its own credibility problems and was rendered increasingly dubious as they abandoned one ally after another.) The opponent could "entrap" the USSR by forcing it to come to its defense should things get out of hand with the Americans. This, in turn, would presumably give the Americans pause about using massive force, which would make them less likely to intervene, thereby increasing the expected benefits from challenging them. With the Never Again policy, the United States would be vulnerable

to local challenges and bluffing escalatory behavior by regional adversaries. We shall see this happening time and again.

The strategy of limited war is not without problems either. On one hand, it does couple means with objectives and does resolve, at least to some extent, the problem of credibility. This increases the likelihood that the U.S. would intervene in a conflict, which should give potential challengers some pause, especially if its force structure can be overwhelmed by conventional means.

On the other hand, if the U.S. does not commit fully, it may not be able to achieve quick victory. The Americans will get bogged down in a war where their military's hands are tied by the administration. However, a democracy cannot usually fight long wars abroad that do not seem to involve clear and present dangers to its polity. Eventually, popular support for such a war would crumble and the U.S. would be compelled to capitulate and withdraw. This lowers the probability that the U.S. would succeed, and increases the expected benefit to fighting it.

Hence, a strategy against limited war would involve prolonging the conflict by avoiding direct engagements with the U.S. military (which would result in instant defeat). The strategy would then call for constant pressure on the U.S. forces, small-scale raids, an occasional large-scale assault, but generally a guerilla-style fighting. The goal would be to inflict significant casualties. This would either (a) cause the American citizens to call for withdrawal because there is no end of the war in sight, the losses are mounting, and the country is fighting for no apparent reason; or (b) cause the government to up the ante by escalating to a point that would provoke the protegee to intervene (e.g. like China did in the Korean War). Either of these two options would work to the challenger's advantage.

Clearly, two extremely important ingredients of such a tactic are (a) ability to prolong the conflict, and (b) ability to absorb significant, often extreme, costs that the U.S. can inflict even with limited means.

Prolonging the conflict means denying victory to the U.S., not winning. As Henry Kissinger remarked, "the guerilla wins if it does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win." Hence, one's force structure must not be vulnerable to conventional attacks for this strategy to succeed. If one relies on a highly industrialized economy for its fighting resources, or good roads for logistics, or sophisticated communication lines, then one cannot fight such a war. The U.S. would "simply" go after its resource base and would render him incapable of staying in the conflict. Hence, a highly advanced industrialized nation cannot rely on this tactic to begin with.

A government would usually have a hard time getting its citizens to suffer the deprivations of war for a long time unless it can convince them that their lives and future are at stake. The essence of the strategy involves outlasting the U.S. in terms of resolve. Even in limitation the American force is formidable and the punishment it can deliver—great. Hence, only nations where population control is extremely tight or ones where the government has the polity's consent to fight (i.e. a supremely

important national cause, like unification) would be able to make use of the tactic.

Ho Chi Minh remarked that even if he lost 10 soldiers for every 1 the enemy lost, he would still win. (He was talking about the French, but it worked just as well against the Americans.) But Ho had the support of his population, and his army was dedicated to victory at any costs. The cause was sufficiently great to keep them fighting. In addition, his forces did not rely on a sophisticated economy that could be sufficiently disrupted. (The Americans did try nevertheless but it did not work.) Defeating guerillas is impossible without the support of the local population, especially if the guerilla refuses to come out and fight. Only when the North Vietnamese switched to conventional tactics did the U.S. finally begin making some headway.

What then is a strategy against a strategy against the limited war strategy? One possibility is to go back to full-scale involvement, except this time one could make the argument that escalation has reached a level that requires full and final commitment. This is unlikely to work because of the opponent's protege and because the citizens would probably not like the idea of increased casualties in a conflict that by then looks unwinnable except at exorbitant costs.

Another possibility is to fight smart, using tactics developed by the Marines. Instead of swatting flies with nukes, as the Army is often wont to do, this strategy involves yanking the local support of the guerillas. Massive fighting results in many civilian casualties, which does not endear the U.S. to the locals. However, "bribing" the locals by protecting them from retaliation, offering them peace and security, helping them establish a workable economy and life, would invariably cause them to drift toward the Americans who seem to be bringing an end to suffering. The Marines were fairly successful in Vietnam and would have probably achieved a lot more had they been allowed to pursue the "hearts and minds" policy.

By now, this tactic is well-recognized and developed. However, it is still remarkably difficult to defeat weak opponents who rely on the two basic principles of guerilla war: avoid direct engagement and steadily inflict pain. You should be recognizing by now that this is a general form of asymmetric warfare. This is exactly what the war on terrorism is all about: defeating such enemies. We shall discuss this in detail later on.