

Research Report

Historical Security Council - 1948 The situation in the Korean Peninsula



MUNISH



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Issue:	The situation in the Korean Peninsula
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Introduction

“If there is one issue on which historians should be able to agree, it is that the artificial division of a country usually creates more problems than it solves” (Rowena Hammal, History Today). Korea is an example of such a country.

When the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) occupied the northern part of the Korean peninsula and the United States of America (USA) occupied the southern part, only a handful of people thought the consequences for the Korean population would be disastrous. According to the two powers it was only a “temporary” division, planned to be removed as soon as it was deemed appropriate. However, this promise was not kept and the two parts of Korea have never been reunited.

During the time of occupation, the two powers involved individually influenced the politics of their section of the peninsula to such a degree that reunification became increasingly difficult as time passed. In 1948, the division of Korea had become permanent and two separate states had been established, the Republic of Korea (commonly referred to as South Korea) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea).

Definition of Key Terms

Polarization (politics)

When the politics in a country are polarized, there exist two strong political attitudes or even ideologies (the two poles) with a great gap between them. Moderated opinions existing between those two attitudes are commonly neglected in a polarized society.



Satellite state

A satellite state is a country that is controlled or strongly influenced politically and financially by another country, despite being formally independent. The name is an analogy to the orbit of a smaller object around a larger object, the smaller object being influenced by and dependent on the larger object.

General Overview

The history of the division

After the Empire of Japan defeated the Russian Empire in 1905, Korea was ruled by the Empire of Japan from 1910 to 1945. As World War II came to an end and as Japan was defeated, the Allies had not yet agreed on Korea's future. Following the bombardment of Hiroshima by the US, the USSR sent soldiers to occupy the northern part of Korea. The US responded quickly and took control over the southern part of the peninsula. The US and the USSR agreed on the 38th parallel as a "temporary" borderline, agreeing on a reunification at a later point in time.

Soon, "People's Committees" were spontaneously formed by citizens all over Korea. In North Korea, these People's Committees were encouraged and supported by the USSR, as these were very similar to the soviets in Russia, and the USSR was aiming to establish a communist government in North Korea. In South Korea, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) shut these committees down

immediately to prevent communist ideas spreading on US territory. The USAMGIK also refused to work with and soon outlawed the Korean People's Republic (KPR), which was an unstable coalition of parties with many different political viewpoints, which only agreed on Korea's independence as their main goal. The KPR wanted to take over the government from the US and the USSR and have Korea ruled by Koreans again.

Similarly, the US refused to cooperate with The Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, which had operated in exile in the People's Republic of China during the



A map of the division of Korea in 1948

Japanese occupation period; the ruling Japan disapproved of the party's communist ideas. The US tried to unify South Korea under a Korean in favour of the US by returning Syngman Rhee who was exiled during the Japanese occupation. Sadly his return did not have the desired effects on the population. Rhee was a strong opponent of Communism and his plans were to arrest all political opponents once he became president. This turned even more citizens of the South against North Korea and only strengthened the polarization on the Korean peninsula.

In the North, the USSR gave Kim Il-Sung power over a totalitarian state. As many citizens were already members of the North Korean Communist Party and political opponents of the ideas represented by that party fled to South Korea, there was little protest to this action amongst the North Korean population. By creating this government, the USSR created a satellite state which was obedient and dependent on them.

With the two different states being formed, the chances of a reunified Korea were decreasing drastically. The US and USSR however had agreed in the Moscow Accords in 1945 that this division would be temporary and that in the end, a Korean government should rule under a trusteeship of the two occupying forces. The Representative Democratic Council (RDC) led by Rhee attended talks on a unified Korea; however these talks broke down due to the now so different natures of the two countries which were once one.

The USSR suggested withdrawing all foreign troops from Korea, but the US was opposed to the idea, arguing that a civil war would then be inevitable. In a last attempt to reunify Korea the United Nations (UN) was asked to act. They set up the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), which was ordered to oversee fair elections for a Korean government. Sadly, this attempt failed due to the USSR immediately blocking the elections, fearing the larger population of the South would outvote the North and create a Korea which would be more supportive towards the US than the USSR.

Situation 1948

Having failed to reunite Korea, the UNTCOK oversaw the elections in South Korea, which made Syngman Rhee President of the Republic of Korea (commonly known as South Korea). In North Korea, Kim Il-Sung was elected Prime Minister/"Leader" of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The division, which at the beginning was promised to be temporary, was now permanent.



Both governments promote an invasion of the other part of the peninsula; both claim to represent the entire Korean population. This makes the situation on the peninsula very tense. There are chances of a Korean war, if no measures are implemented.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The state established with support from the USSR is headed by Kim Il-Sung. This so called democratic state is, contrary to its name, a totalitarian state. The regime openly advocates a military invasion of the South to reunify Korea. Additionally, North Korea can be described as a satellite state of the USSR, relying heavily on the USSR for its military. Its economy is far more industrialised compared to the South.

Republic of Korea

South Korea is headed by the elected President Syngman Rhee and is supported by the US. Although it can be described as more democratic than the North, the regime acted with harsh measures on left-wing supporters, taking the lives of 30,000 to 100,000 political opponents in South Korea. The Republic of Korea relies on agriculture as the main industry.

United States of America

The US occupied the southern part of Korea in order to prevent the USSR from occupying large parts of East Asia as it did with Eastern Europe. As seen in their actions in Korea, it is not their main interest to rebuild a nation, more to secure their power equality with the USSR.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The USSR is a union of states with communistic governments led by Russia. Its soldiers were ordered to invade Korea with the goal of gaining power in that region. The USSR supported the left-wing groups in Korea and created a state that was obedient to them while supporting them both economically and militarily (they formed a satellite state).

People's Republic of China

Although China is not directly involved in the attempts at reunification, it holds a strategic standpoint in a possible future conflict, as it is North Korea's direct bordering nation. Military support coming from China to North Korea in a possible Korean war could result in an international conflict between China and USSR and on the other side the US. Until 1948, China is officially neutral.



Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1910-1945	Occupation of the Korean peninsula by the Empire of Japan
August 9 th , 1945	Manchuria (an area in Asia including Korea) is invaded by soldiers of the USSR
August 10 st 1945	Two US officers decide on the 38 th parallel as the borderline of the American occupation zone
September 7 th , 1945	American General arrives in South Korea and heads the Military Government
October 1945	Kim Il-Sung, a former guerrilla fighter, is brought into North Korea by the USSR
December 1945	USSR and US agree on their future plans for Korea in the Moscow Accords
November 14 th , 1947	GA passes first resolution on elections in Korea
August 1948	Syngman Rhee becomes first President of the Republic of Korea
September 9 th , 1948	Kim Il-Sung becomes leader of the newly established DPRK
December 12 th , 1948	GA passes second resolution approving of the elections in South Korea

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

As stated before, the US asked the UN to assist in the reunification. In 1947, the General Assembly passed a resolution urging elections to be held on the entire peninsula and forming the UNTCOK to oversee these elections. However, due to the USSR blocking these elections fearing their protected state might be outvoted by the larger population of the South, these elections did not take place as planned. At the 3rd General Assembly in 1948, another resolution was passed, approving of the democratically elected government of South Korea.

- The problem of the independence of Korea, 14 November 1947 (**A/RES/2/112**)
- The problem of the independence of Korea, 12 December 1948 (**A/RES/3/195**)



Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The initial plan by the US and the USSR was to divide Korea temporarily and later reunify it. However, instead of creating two states that could unify at a later time, they created two completely opposing states, in politics and economy. The problem of Korea's independence could have been solved in 1945 by not dividing the country. If that was too difficult to accomplish, the US and the USSR could have agreed on an earlier reunification or at least better compatibility between the two systems so that at a later time, these could be reunified without the problems that are faced now.

Seeing that the attempts to reunify Korea by means of democratic elections overseen by the UN were blocked by the USSR, these can be evaluated as unsuccessful. Following the failed elections, the USSR and the US attempted to create strong states in Korea to stabilize the situation on the peninsula. However, due to the open advocacy of violence as a solution on both sides, the goal of a stabilized situation was not met. Rather than acting as nation-builders, the USSR and the US can be described as occupying forces acting according to their own needs, claiming to want to reunify two countries they pulled apart.

Possible Solutions

In my opinion, the only effective long-term solution to this problem is to reunify North and South Korea. Korea has been a sovereign state for a thousand years before the Japanese occupation, and the people of Korea still suffer from the division. Reunification could be achieved by creating a committee of all the major political interest groups from South and North Korea aided by UN experts on the relevant topics. This committee could discuss how the unified Korea should be formed.

During the occupation periods of Korea, there have been various committees such as the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea composed of different interest groups all with the goal of Korean independence, which have been neglected. If representatives from different groups such as these come together and discuss the unified future the population has wanted for a long time, they could form a state that the population would approve of. This would remove tensions on the peninsula and create a stable state, if done correctly.



Keeping the states apart is not solving the issue, it is postponing a conflict. The population did not choose to divide the country when the occupational forces came in. Next to the population wanting to be united, the leaders of the now separate states have publicly shown interest in a military reunification, which would be devastating for both countries. It would be difficult to convince these governments to act peacefully and cooperate with each other.

Despite that the solution may be difficult to implement, it would yield long-term stability in Korea, which is ultimately the objective of the debate on this issue. If no measures are implemented to unify the two parts of Korea, then a war reaching much further than the Korean peninsula might break out.

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Appendix

It is recommended that the delegates inform themselves on the consequences of the division that unfolded after 1948. As this simulation will take place in 1948, this is not mandatory; however it certainly could be useful when finding solutions of your own to this problem. One article covering the long-term consequences which happened after 1948 in depth can be found here: <http://www.history.com/topics/korean-war>

