

SPECIALIST SUPPORT FOR THE ENQUIRIES

1E WHY DID THE UNO JOIN THE USA IN THE KOREAN WAR?

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THE UN FORUMS WERE EVOLVING IN THE COLD WAR CLIMATE

In the shadow of the Second World War, the United Nations (UN) was established by the victorious Allies – the United States, United Kingdom, China, Soviet Union and France – during the San Francisco Conference on 25 April 1945.

Bringing together independent countries from across the globe, the construction of the UN represented the advent of a new international order: an inter-governmental organisation that sought to define, lobby and petition for peace rather than wage war. Decisions made under the aegis of the organisation, such as the adoption of the UN Human Rights Declaration in December 1948, established new norms in states' fundamental duties towards their citizens and, in tandem, encouraged movements for self-determination within colonising nations. In the post-war context, diplomatic discussions within the UN about human rights, humanitarian relief and international law indicated that the world's leaders intended to participate in the UN as a means not only to repair the damage of the past decade, but also to ensure that such violations never happened again.

However, only a few years following the conclusion of the Second World War, diplomatic conflict between the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, was rapidly accelerating. As the two nations fought for ideological supremacy, the primary forums of the UN – the Security Council and the General Assembly – became the preferred spaces for debate. The organisation provided a unique forum whereby representatives from all UN member states were given a platform to present a resolution or to debate those presented by others. Thus, it was the perfect environment for diplomats to assert the ideological convictions and political weight of their nation on the world's stage.

The UN forums also provided an environment where the superpowers could vie for allegiance from other member states, encouraging a combative environment. This geopolitical dynamic served to stymie any diplomatic progress anticipated in the cosmopolitan UN Charter: how could the organisation's member states work in unity towards peace in the context of the Cold War?

THE POWER OF VETO ALLOWED PERMANENT MEMBERS TO BLOCK ACTIONS FOR IDEOLOGICAL REASONS

The procedures that facilitated the operations of the UN were also at odds with the conflict between the two superpowers. At the centre of the organisation's functionality was the UN Charter, a document that outlined the specific activities that the organisation was permitted to perform and the requirements of nations for membership. The UN Charter did not explicitly authorise the organisation to construct or lead peacekeeping missions, but it did give permission for the Security Council to respond to breaches of international peace and security. Member states within the Council could call upon other nations to take measures to restore stability, and this resolution would then be taken to a vote. Although this process appeared democratic, the five founders of the UN were provided the special privilege of veto-power over any resolution with which they disagreed. In the evolving conflict of the Cold War, this power was a significant means for the superpowers to interfere in the international interventions of the others. As all permanent members were legally required to support a resolution for it to be authorised by the Security Council, the activities of the forum were frequently immobilised by the use of veto by the US or Soviet Union. It was the guaranteed frustration

of this procedural tactic, with relative ease of use, that contributed to its frequent deployment: the diplomatic costs of a veto were low while the benefits of frustrating an ideological enemy were high.

THE USSR BOYCOTT OPENED THE DOOR FOR THE UN TO SUPPORT US ACTION IN KOREA

As the Cold War diplomatic battles within the UN Security Council continued to rage, the conflict was beginning to have real impact on the ground in North and South Korea. Despite the constraints of the UN Charter, the organisation, hypothetically, could potentially deploy armed forces as a reaction to a breach of the peace. Using the vague wording of the UN Charter, the US representatives alerted the UN Security Council to the North Korean belligerents' invasion of the southern territory and called for an international response to the armed attack.

During most of 1950, the Soviet Union had chosen to boycott the UN forum because the organisation had accepted a representative of Taiwan to take China's chair rather than a representative from the People's Republic of China. This absence meant that the normal five permanent members of the UN were reduced to four – an absence that had never been legally accounted for in the UN Charter. Could a resolution ever be authorised through the Security Council if all permanent members were not present and voting? However, this legal quandary was overlooked, and the United Nations Command (UNC) was authorised by UN Security Council Resolution 83 in June 1950.

A truly unique armed force, the UNC positioned the UN as a belligerent actor within the conflict, despite its lack of military authority over the force. The 16 countries who unified against the communist invasion from the North were militarily and strategically led by the existing US personnel on the ground. Thus, although transnational in design, the UNC was directed towards the protection and supremacy of pro-capitalist (and US) interests. Although fighting under the UN flag, the military character and strategy employed by the transnational battalions was far from a UN-staff-led mission.

THE DECISION WAS A PRECEDENT THAT HELPED CHANGE DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES AT THE UN

The influence of the UNC on the evolution of peacekeeping is significant. The context of the UNC and its presence on the ground in South Korea provided a legal and operational precedent for future UN missions. As a diplomatic collaboration, it was a military experiment held together under the principles of the UN. The existence of this multinational force forged in the name of 'peace' – or anti-communism – led to the creation of the 'Uniting for Peace' General Assembly resolution, which permitted member states to circumvent the permanent members' right to veto in cases of a breach to the peace to introduce the resolution to the General Assembly. Thus, due to the procedural and diplomatic dynamics of the UNC, the functions of the General Assembly were expanded from being exclusively a deliberative forum to being an operational forum capable of authorising 'appropriate measures' for the resolution of international peace.

1F HOW DID BRITAIN RESPOND TO THE KOREAN WAR?

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STRATEGIC BRITISH INTERESTS DICTATED GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE KOREAN WAR

When the Korean War began in June 1950, the British Labour government of Clement Attlee had been in power for five years, having been re-elected earlier that year.

The Labour government fulsomely supported the denunciation of North Korea as the aggressor in the conflict, through the UN Security Council. Moreover, when the US engineered an intervention on the Peninsula, to counter North Korean advances into the South, under the guise of the UN, the British establishment agreed that the British Far East fleet, already stationed in Asia, could be mobilised in support. This was unsurprising given that the British elites, the government, foreign office and army had been keen to forge closer ties with the US throughout the post-World War II period, which had culminated in the establishment of NATO in 1949.

However, the senior commanders of the armed forces, in particular, expressed concerns that British military power in Asia, where imperial possessions such as Hong Kong and Malaya were still prized, would be unnecessarily stretched by the deployment of ground troops in Korea. These concerns encouraged the Attlee government to initially decide against sending such a combat force to engage with the army of Kim Il Sung. This was deemed only partial support by Washington, who were unflinching in their desire to have their closest ally support their intervention in Korea with combat troops.

Under this pressure, dominant figures within the military and Foreign Office altered their stance and came around to the view that any rupture in US–UK relations as a result of British non-deployment of ground forces would be potentially more damaging to British interests than not doing so. Influenced by

changed attitudes from other key players, the Labour government shifted its own position, and by the end of July 1950, Britain was committed to sending ground forces to Korea, with the first battalion arriving within a month.

THERE WAS MORE CONTINUITY THAN CHANGE UNDER SUCCESSIVE LABOUR AND CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENTS

Developments regarding Korea in the summer of 1950 demonstrated how decision-making regarding British foreign policy at this juncture was not just the preserve of the government but, rather, it evolved within a polycratic state.

In its dealings with the joint Chiefs of Staff and Foreign Office, voices within the Attlee government did not present perspectives regarding Britain's place in the world, which were at odds with those of the supposed bastions of conservatism – the military and Foreign Office. The public-school-educated doyennes of the Foreign Office and the military were speaking the same language, regarding Korea, as the Minister of Defence, Manny Shinwell, who first emerged on the public scene as a socialist agitator during the 'Red Clydeside' movement that came out of World War I.

Eventually a split did occur within the Labour cabinet over Korea, which saw three leftist ministers resign, including, most famously, the architect of the NHS, Bevan. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that concerns about the Korean War as an imperialistic venture had some influence upon those who resigned, yet publicly they claimed that their opposition was the cost of the intervention, which precipitated the introduction of some charges for NHS patients, which they were unwilling to swallow.

When Churchill's Conservative administration replaced Labour, following the October 1951

general election, the conflict in Korea was still ongoing, although by that point it had settled into the stalemate that would continue right up to the end of the conflict in 1953. However, there was basically no alteration to the British position in Korea. Indeed, Cabinet discussions pertaining to the conflict did not entertain the idea that the new government might adopt a policy altered from its predecessor. The Korean War is therefore a good indicator of the immense continuities between the foreign policy of the two British parties of government in the post-World War II, Cold War era.

GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA UNITED TO DISMISS DISSENTERS

Much of the domestic population responded to British intervention in Korea with a combination of puzzlement and fear. Britain was fighting in a faraway theatre, of which most knew little, and this so soon after World War II and its associated horrors, including the Blitz and evacuation. Attlee made a very public case to engender support for British intervention, by highlighting its centrality to the domestic front and arguably fomenting the aforementioned fears, claiming that ‘a fire in Korea may burn down your house’.

With both major party frontbenches supporting British intervention, including the deployment of ground forces, and with most of the media unquestioning of the conflict as well, it is not surprising that dissent in Britain was limited. The miniscule British Communist Party, not unexpectedly, was critical, and a few Labour backbenchers were doubtful, but the most famous dissenters were individuals.

In 1951, town planner Monica Felton conducted a ‘fact finding’ mission in Korea, thanks to an invite from the women’s section of the International Democratic Foundation. Felton critiqued British and American operations on the Peninsula by suggesting that their treatment of North Koreans entailed ‘ruthless barbarity that was beyond imagination’. Felton was subsequently sacked from her job and vilified in the media.

Another dismissed by his employers for espousing similar concerns was journalist James Cameron. Cameron, later the founder member of CND, was fired from the *Picture Post* for attempting to publish horrific images of violence exacted against the North Korean population.

Other dissenters, including the ‘Red Dean of Canterbury’ Hewlett Johnson and the scientist Joseph Needham, particularly the former, were criticised in the media and condemned by various politicians for questioning whether the US had used biological weapons during the conflict.

The scathing response to dissenters, from all but the most fringe leftist publications, i.e. the communist newspaper *The Daily Worker*, highlights a unanimity between political decision-makers in Cold War Britain and the media, the supposed proponents of heterodox critical discourse on all matters of public interest, including foreign policy. Moreover, it poses questions regarding media ownership and continuities of personnel and world view across the British political, military and cultural elites, relating to their shared backgrounds.

1G THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE OF THE IMJIN RIVER

Henry Palmer

The Battle of the Imjin was the bloodiest engagement the British Army experienced during the Korean War. The 29th British Independent Infantry Brigade held back a Chinese Spring Offensive directed at the capital of South Korea, Seoul. During this four-day battle between 22 and 25 April 1951, the 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment were surrounded and eventually captured, along with members of the 170 Independent Mortar Battery. These soldiers held out on and around the hill designated 'Hill 235', south of the Imjin River. Despite being outnumbered, the Glosters allowed UN forces to retreat and reform. This offensive would see the end to the mobile phase of the Korean War and begin the stalemate that would last until an armistice was signed in July 1953. It would also give rise to debate on its significance.

BACKGROUND

The war before Imjin had four distinct phases:

- The North Koreans invaded in June 1950, pushing American and South Korean forces back to the port of Pusan.
- With UN reinforcements, including British forces, the North Koreans were beaten back all the way to the Yalu River, the natural border between China and North Korea, by November.
- At this point, China declared war, pushing back UN forces and capturing Seoul in January 1951.
- Finally, a counter-offensive by UN forces retook Seoul, creating a buffer-zone at the 38th parallel in March.

China's main aim by this time was to push all UN forces out of the Peninsula and unite a communist Korea. The Battle of the Imjin would occur as Chinese forces mounted an offensive to retake Seoul and destroy UN brigades, such as the British 29th Brigade, that stood in their way (MacKenzie, 2013). The aim of the UN Command on the other hand, was to maintain a defensive line just north of the 38th parallel, from the Imjin River in the west

to Wonsan on the east coast. This would provide General Matthew B. Ridgeway, the commander-in-chief of UN operations in Korea, flexibility in dealing with the build-up of Chinese forces in the vicinity of the 38th parallel (Son, 2018).

THE MAIN EVENTS

The UN forces held a zigzag formation on their front line. Chinese forces identified this as a weakness that would allow them to focus their troops on isolating sections of the UN line from their flanking units (Kim, 2018). The Glosters, under Lieutenant Colonel Carne, the Royal Artillery and the reserves had 773 men holding three points with a three-kilometre gap to the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers' position on their right and Belgian Volunteers on their left. British forces were better armed than the Chinese, but they were about to meet a force of 27–30,000 soldiers.

On 22 April 1951, a patrol of Glosters met the waiting Chinese forces north of the Imjin at 6:00 am, where they engaged, but they soon returned to an allied position south of the river. With not enough men to hold the entire front, the companies of the battalion occupied hill positions, which were considered by Major P. W. Weller as 'fairly secure' (MacKenzie, 2013, pp. 41–42).

First contact began at 9:45 am on 22 April with Chinese forces crossing the Imjin River. The 29th Brigade was able to hold them off until 11:30 pm. 'They kept coming in waves, large numbers of them, however intense the fire they just seemed to keep coming', a Corporal of the Glosters remembered (MacKenzie, 2013, p. 40).

On the morning of 23 April at 7:00 am, the Glosters 'beg[a]n to run out of ammunition...', as one of the Glosters remembered (MacKenzie, 2013, p. 64). D Company withdrew from its position at 8:30 am, after covering A and B Companies, before repositioning around Hill 235. Then, during the night, C Company and battalion

HQ moved to Hill 235, and during the day on 24 April, B Company joined them. The Northumberland and Belgians on the flanks were in trouble, with all companies being engaged, and by night the Chinese soldiers managed to infiltrate between the brigades and reach artillery a mile behind the Northumberland (MacKenzie, 2013).

On 25 April at 8:30 am, the USAF finally got through to supply support for the Glosters, strafing napalm on the Chinese forces, which revolted some of the Glosters, but soon after, the Glosters' position became untenable. Lieutenant Colonel Carne ordered Company A, followed by the rest, to make their way off the hill at 10:00 am on the final day (MacKenzie, 2013). The Glosters had lost 623 men: 597 non-officers missing/killed/wounded, along with 26 officers, meaning that only 43 men made it back to friendly territory.

POST-MORTEM

The events as reported to commanders outside the battlefield differed from the situation as recorded by the Glosters. For example: on the final day's report, the 29th were holding position; it was also noted that an infantry and tank taskforce had reached the Glosters and that 'all is well with the battalion' (The National Archives, 'Made by the Ministry of Defence', no. 262). It was not until the day after that the report stated that the Glosters were completely isolated, with no news on relief, while the rest of the 29th Brigade had withdrawn (The National Archives, 'Made by the Ministry of Defence', no. 263). This failure to achieve a clear picture of the circumstances surrounding the Glosters would result in much of the post-battle debate.

The immediate reaction to the battle was to search for those responsible for the fate of the Glosters. Tom Brodie, a brigade commander, would take some of the blame, while blame would go higher to General Ridgway, who wrote on 9 May: 'I cannot but feel a certain disquiet that down through the channel of command, the full responsibility for realizing the danger to which this unit exposed them for extricating it when that danger became grave, was not recognized nor implemented.' (MacKenzie, 2013, p. 190)

Lieutenant General James A. Van Fleet suggested that Colonel J. P. Carne was at fault, stating that he 'did not indicate the seriousness of his position and the need for either additional help or withdrawal' (MacKenzie, 2013, p. 191). This understatement came while a Filipino-led armoured relief column attempted to reach the Glosters. When asked for an update on their situation, the Glosters replied: 'A bit sticky; things are pretty sticky down there' (MacKenzie, 2013, pp. 81–82) – a statement that might demonstrate the seriousness to British high command but not to American-led UN command.

Eventually, the debate was put aside for the promotion of UN co-operation. The actions of the Glosters were promoted as an example of proper strategy. On 8 May 1951, the 1st Battalion Gloucester and 170th Independent Mortar Battery survivors received the Presidential Citation, the highest US award to military units, which appeared in *The Times* the next day (Fisher and Lohan, 2006).

This came at an opportune moment, as *The Sunday Times* had published an article quoting the President of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, 'The British had outlived their welcome in my country.' This could not be proven and was disavowed by President Rhee, but the backlash, especially from front-line soldiers, was seen as a threat to morale (The National Archives, 'Made by the Foreign Office'). Since the decision to promote the actions of the Glosters, there has not been further debate surrounding who was responsible for the Glosters' fate.

CONCLUSION

The Battle of the Imjin was a hard-fought battle, during which the Chinese had the advantage in strategy and manpower. Despite the odds, the British 29th Brigade was able to hold them back, alongside their fellow UN forces, while the Glosters held longer, allowing their allies to withdraw. The Glosters have been honoured and became a symbol of resistance to support morale during the war. However, the battle, like the war itself, is a largely ignored subject in Britain. This despite the fact that veterans who survived the battle are still alive, the actions taken by national servicemen at Imjin River to help secure the continued existence of the South Korean state, and the achievement of the highest US award to a unit.

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1H THE KOREAN WAR: IMPACT AND MEMORY

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When war broke out in 1950, Korea was seen as a distant nation of little immediate interest to the British public. Some British cabinet officials were allegedly unsure where Korea actually was (Norton-Taylor, 2010). The war in Korea was not seen as a direct threat to Britain, and the Labour government was not as invested in the global struggle against communism as America was.

Furthermore, World War II had left British people predictably nervous about another war. Its public were reluctant to send their sons and fathers into battle. In 1945, the British electorate had voted for a government promising an unprecedented level of domestic investment in social policies for housing and health. Yet the nation was still financially unstable, and the electorate were understandably concerned at the effect it might have if vital government funding and tax payer money was diverted to a war in Asia.

Thus, it is easy to see the reasons why Britain was reluctant to engage in the Korean War. It is therefore equally important to understand why they did.

Regardless of these legitimate concerns, Atlee advised his government that backing the US in Korea was 'distant, yes, but nonetheless an obligation' (Norton-Taylor, 2010). He meant that they were obliged to do so by their commitment to the UN and their relationship with the US. However, Britain had other strategic concerns. The government was anxious that the invasion of South Korea might encourage the Soviets to threaten Europe, and was aware that supporting American forces in Korea might increase their chances of having American support in the event of any conflict on European soil.

There were limits to the British support. Some government officials were worried about the role of General Douglas MacArthur in the war, seeing his actions as excessively aggressive. They were also keen to look after Britain's ongoing interests in the East, which included keeping Hong Kong

stable and protecting the government in Malaya. Thus, when asked to impose sanctions on China to aid the war effort, Britain refused.

This same ambivalence towards the conflict is evidenced in the way in which the war has been remembered.

HOW THE BRITISH CONTRIBUTION TO THE KOREAN WAR HAS BEEN MEMORIALISED

Britain originally pledged only naval support to the war in Korea, but subsequently sent troops that formed a major part of the First Commonwealth Division. British troops came face to face with the Chinese insurgency in 1951, played a key role in the Battle of the Imjin, then patrolled the 38th parallel as peace negotiations between North and South Korea dragged on for two years.

Despite this contribution and the 1,078 dead, the Korean War was largely understudied, un-commemorated, and uninteresting to members of the British public in the decades that followed.

As noted by Huxford (2018), the narrative began to change from the 1980s. The British Korean Veterans Association was finally formed in 1981, allowing British veterans to talk to each other about their Korean experiences. Following the 60th anniversary of the war, Britain unveiled its first official Korean War Memorial in 2014, although, significantly, this memorial was a gift from the Republic of Korea rather than a British commission.

There can be no doubt that Britain has been slow or disinterested in commemorating the Korean War. Most dedications to soldiers that lost their lives in the conflict are plaques attached to existing memorials to the dead of the Great War and World War II. These memorials were initiated by Korean veterans, and often specific to local areas and regiments. Many veterans found the lack of government involvement in remembrance either frustrating or downright offensive.

HOW THE WAR HAS BEEN MEMORIALISED IN KOREA AND THE USA

North Korea is equally uneasy with commemorating the war. In Panmunjeom, within the building where the Korean ceasefire was signed in 1953, sits the North Korean Peace Museum. It hosts a traditionally designed memorial statue as well as an information area about the Korea War.

By contrast, South Korea is home to many monuments and cemeteries, as well as the War Memorial of Korea, which was created in 1994 to teach the military history of South Korea in an effort to avoid future atrocities.

The United States has an even greater number of memorials dedicated to the Korean War. There are memorials dedicated to those who served as well as to those that lost their lives in the conflict. The remarkable Korean War Veterans Memorial consists of 19 large statues of soldiers marching/proceeding towards the pool of tranquillity, alongside a wall of images from the conflict and the names of United Nation member states that served alongside the United States in Korea.

UNCOVERING THE IMPACT OF THE WAR ON KOREAN CIVILIANS

Military deaths were dwarfed by civilian casualties in both North and South, yet these are little memorialised, and uncovering the true extent of civilian suffering has been complex and controversial. This is particularly true of the accusations of atrocities that have been uncovered in the South.

Through the war, there were a huge number of civilian deaths. Victims were killed by bombing and crossfire, but also deliberately by their own government, as South Korean troops sought to destroy any communist sympathisers and collaborators. The South Korean leadership feared that many people would be swayed in favour of the communist cause if a North Korean army invaded their village, and so the South Korean army sought to destroy these potential traitors.

In 2005, the South Korean government formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea.

Its purpose was, in the words of its president, to 'settle the past' and 'provide a more comprehensive resolution'. A government body set up to last four years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had a mandate to 'investigate illegal massacres before and after the Korean War, human rights violations due to constitutional and legal violations or unlawful exercise of authority, incidents involving suspicious manipulation of the truth, and other historical incidents deserving the Commission's attention'. This included investigating atrocities committed against its own people by the former South Korean government.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission interviewed survivors of the Korean War and investigated burials at sites where mass killings were believed to have happened. The Commission found ditches filled with hundreds of bodies, some still tied together by barbed wire, in positions that clearly corroborated the survivors' stories.

The Commission found that civilians had been regularly targeted by troops scouring the country to eliminate potential communists. In one incident in Naju, in 1950, South Korean officers disguised themselves as a North Korean unit of soldiers and then shot every civilian that welcomed the communists to their home.

The Commission gave a voice to many whose stories had not been told for years under authoritarian leadership. Despite this, the Commission was seen as slow, unproductive and costly. Two-hundred-and-forty researchers worked on just 300 cases over a four-year period, yet the Commission estimated that 100,000 South Koreans died at the government's hands – systematically slaughtered by the army. Allegedly, there were also over 200 instances of mass killings instigated by American warplanes and ground troops.

Some civilians were also disappointed by the Commission's inability to prosecute their oppressors. The Commission was not a court. It was set up to discover the truth of what happened in the years 1950 to 1953, but it was not empowered to prosecute offenders, although it could offer reconciliation through compensation to victims' families.

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