

# The Korean Armistice of 1953 and its Consequences Part I

James Hoare: *The Korean Armistice North and South: The Low-Key Victory*

Gordon Daniels: *The British Press and the Korean Armistice: Antecedents, Opinions and Prognostications*

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## Preface

The Suntory Centre, STICERD, held a symposium on 15 October 2003 to re-examine the armistice of 1953 which followed the Korean War. The intention was to discuss the reaction of those countries who were both immediately and more distantly concerned in the light of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The following papers were presented:

Dr James Hoare on the Korean perspective

Dr Rana Mitter (Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Oxford) on the Chinese perspective

Professor Takahiko Tanaka (Hitotsubashi University and academic visitor, LSE) on the Japanese perspective

Dr Gordon Daniels (formerly of the University of Sheffield) on the reactions of the British press on the war and its aftermath

The papers by Dr Hoare and Dr Daniels appear in Part I of this discussion paper while those of Professor Tanaka and Dr Mitter will appear shortly in Part II.

The Centre is grateful to the authors for allowing us to reproduce their papers here.

The symposium was held in association with British Association of Korean Studies and the Japan Society, London.

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## Abstracts

Hoare: Both North and South Korea claim victory in the Korean War. Yet neither makes much of the ending of the war in July 1953, and both have had problems coming to terms with the reality of the war. The reality is that both suffered so much in a conflict that achieved little that formal celebrations seem inappropriate.

Daniels: The outbreak of the Korean war in 1950 and the ferocious fighting which took place affected Britain, whose army took part in the war. This essay records the different shades of opinion expressed in its various newspapers/journals.

**Keywords**: Korea, Korean war; 1950; Korean armistice; commemoration; Britain; Japan; China; newspapers, museums, monuments.

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## The Korean Armistice North and South: The Low-Key Victory

James Hoare

This is less an academic paper than a reflection on how both Koreas, North and South, handle the anniversary of the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement at Panmunjom on 27 July 1953, an event which put a temporary halt to hostilities on the Korean peninsula. Although it attempts to cover both North and South Korea, it began as a look at the North Korean treatment of the 27 July anniversary, and that is perhaps still the strongest element in the paper.

The origins of this paper, and indeed of the seminar, lie in my return to Pyongyang in July 2001 after a visit to Britain. I had been appointed as the first British official representative to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – North Korea – in January 2001, and had taken up residence in Pyongyang in May 2001. I was now returning to North Korea after a rushed visit to the United Kingdom, where I had ran into problems over medical clearance that had delayed my return. Indeed, at one point, it looked as though I would not get clearance and would not return. But the problems were overcome, and my wife and I set out for Pyongyang on 25 July. We had only one night's pause in Beijing, and then it was straight on to Pyongyang on 27 July, since it was planned that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Chief Clerk, the title by which the head of the administration was then known, would arrive on 28 July so that a formal opening of the embassy could take place on 30 July.

I must confess that, despite three years living in Seoul and various pieces of work on the Korean War over the years, it was only when we arrived at the airport in Pyongyang and my colleagues said that there was going to be 'night dancing' that evening to mark the anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, did it dawn on me that this was the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Korean War. Yet in this apparently most military of countries, the anniversary was to be marked by a low-key, civilian event, not the large-scale type of military parade with which most people associate the North Koreans.<sup>1</sup>

Yet so it was. There had been no parade of tanks, no lines of marching soldiers. Instead, the end of the Korean War was marked by rather sedate circle dances, with

large groups of young Koreans taking part. For the most part, the girls looked bored and many of the young men seemed drunk, but it was a good-natured affair, with occasional attempts to drag the watching foreigners into the dances.

July 2002 passed in the same manner, even though in the meantime, relations with the United States, always presented as the main enemy of North Korea, had deteriorated badly, and much anti-American sentiment was to be found in the posters on the streets and in the media. And even 2003, with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war and problems with the United States having developed into a major crisis, the armistice was once more marked in relatively low-key fashion. There were no parades, although there were wreath-laying ceremonies, as on all such occasions, at Kim Il-sung's statue on Mansudae Hill in the heart of Pyongyang, and also at the monument to the Chinese People's Volunteers. Despite foreign media attempts to cast a sinister shadow over the events, these were a rerun of earlier years, with young people holding 'festive events' in Pyongyang's Kim Il-sung square, an art exhibition dealing with the war, and veterans telling their stories at the People's Palace of Culture, a rather gaunt building used for meetings. The only difference from earlier years was that the anti-US statements were markedly harsher than what I had seen and heard in 2001 and 2002. Given the sharp deterioration in relation since the visit by US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly in October 2002, and the effective ending of the 1994 Agreed Framework and the related KEDO project, a certain increase in the sharpness of tone seemed to me inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

All this left me thinking why this should be so. When I thought back to my time in Seoul (1981-85), it struck me that the Republic of Korea (South Korea) had also been surprisingly reticent about celebrating the end of the Korean War, even though, like the North Koreans, the South claimed that the armistice had been a victory.

A discussion with the then Republic of Korea Ambassador, Ra Jong-il, himself a scholar of the Korean War, led to the idea of a seminar. The ambassador indicated that he would be willing to take part.

Much has changed since then. Ambassador Ra moved on to a new and more challenging position that will have left him little time to consider the 1953 armistice

and the idea of marking the occasion grew into something more than a seminar about how the armistice is or is not marked by the two Koreas. But that is still the subject I would like to probe.

In fact, an examination of the record shows that from the very beginning, neither side, despite both claiming victory in the war, has ever made a great deal of the armistice itself, and neither has really celebrated the event from the very beginning. In 1953, North Korea marked the armistice with a military parade and speeches, but thereafter does not seem to have done so. In the lists of holidays and festivals that are celebrated in North Korea, 27 July does not feature. It is not listed with such 'festivals of the people' as the birthdays of Kim Jong-il on 16 February, or Kim Il-sung on 15 April, or 25 April, celebrated as Army Day. These are proper holidays, with time off work and, when possible, extra rations. By contrast, 27 July seem always to be a low-key event.

One possible measure of how North Korea views events may be found by examining its postage stamp issue.<sup>3</sup> North Korea issues stamps in abundance. Nowadays, a single year may see hundreds of stamps issued, which may have more to do with revenue-raising than with the letter writing habits of the North Koreans. It was more restrained in its early days, though even then, there were signs of a generous issue policy. In 1953 alone, for example, apart from definitives, 13 other stamps were issued. The single stamp issued on 28 July 1953 to mark victory in the Korean War thus seems unusually low-key, even by the practices of the time.

It was 10 years before the end of the war would be marked again. A pair of stamps in 1958 marked the departure of the Chinese 'People's Volunteers', whose entry into the war in the autumn of 1950 was also commemorated by a double issue in 1960. But although stamps were by now flowing thick and fast off the presses, the end of the war was not commemorated until 1963, when again only a single, low value stamp appeared.

In the 1970s, the DPRK stamp world took off in spectacular fashion. Now stamps appeared showing such unlikely North Korean heroes and heroines as Rembrandt and Joan of Arc. Yet no stamp appeared to mark the armistice anniversary in 1973,

and although the newly refurbished Korean War Museum featured, that was not until December 1973 and no attempt was made to link the issue with the end of the Korean War. In the early 1980s, the British Royal wedding between the Prince and Princess of Wales featured, as did the latter's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. That coincided with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war, but of the 95 stamps issued, again only a single low value stamp marked the occasion.

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary did see a bigger splash. Two stamps appeared, each in a miniature sheet, emphasising Kim Il-sung's role in the war. Now, it must be assumed, there will be nothing until the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013.

Other forms of commemoration are also all relatively low key. It is true that a Museum of the Victory in the Fatherland Liberation War, as the conflict is formally described in the DPRK, was organised in 1953, and refurbished and reopened in 1974. This understandably makes much of the earlier part of the war, especially the highly successful campaigns of June-September 1950, but it appears to be relatively silent on the armistice.<sup>4</sup> Neither does it appear to be much visited. On the three or so occasions that I have been there since 1998, there has been scarcely another visitor in sight, though the vast size makes it difficult to judge, and also limits what one can actually see on any given visit. (On my various trips, I saw virtually the same rooms, with particular emphasis on the diorama of the battle of Taech'on.)

Panmunjom, where the armistice was actually signed, makes more of the event. Guides, drawn from the Korean People's Army, tell the story of the war and the armistice negotiations as a victory for the North and a defeat for the United States, and the site of the actual signing is treated as a major historical monument. However, few North Koreans seem to visit Panmunjom, which is of course within the highly sensitive Demilitarized Zone. Booklets produced for sale in a variety of languages are available, but they tend to emphasise alleged 'United States' violations of the armistice agreement, rather than the signing of the agreement itself.<sup>5</sup>

The main formal monument to the war was not constructed until 1993-94, on a site adjacent to the War Museum, beside the Potang River. The area still has some low-

key life size statues dating from the 1950s, but the new monument now overshadows these. The new monument consists of a huge gate beyond which stand two structures, one of which has a piece by Kim Il-sung, and the other a poem. Beyond them, a series of heroic statues depicting various scenes from the Korean War led up to a huge figure depicting 'Victory'. To a Western eye, it is all very reminiscent of Soviet era war memorials in Europe; indeed, 'Victory' could be taken from the Soviet war memorial in Budapest. Korean tour parties come to visit this monument, and it has also become one of the scenic backdrops around the city against which newly-wed couples are photographed. Whistle-blowing officials make sure that nobody goes too close to the statues.<sup>6</sup>

Other monuments are not very prominent. In the 1950s, a tall statue of a soldier carrying a machine gun stood on Haebang Hill in the city centre, and visiting delegations laid wreaths there. But the area is now within the Korean Workers' Party compound, and off limits to ordinary people. Whether the monument survives is not known. It, or a version of it, may be preserved in the Fatherland War Museum.<sup>7</sup> There is no Korean War cemetery as such, though some of the leaders are remembered in the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery on Mount Taesong on the edge of Pyongyang. Others may be buried in the Patriotic Martyrs' Cemetery just outside the city, but this receives much less attention than the Revolutionary Martyrs.

The Chinese People's Volunteers have a monument not far from the Chinese Embassy, erected in 1959, and ceremonies are held there each year to mark their intervention in the war. Otherwise, the only visitors to it are Chinese. A memorial book lists the names of Chinese officers killed in the conflict. There are also supposed to be two Chinese Volunteers' cemeteries near the city, one of which contains the grave of Mao Zedong's eldest son, Mao Anying, but we did not find either.<sup>8</sup> The Soviet cemetery, in the city not far from the diplomatic quarter, has some Korean-war era graves, and Soviet forces took part in the air war in Korea, but it is not known how many of these are graves of combatants. While ceremonies are held there to mark Victory in Europe Day and Victory over Japan Day, nothing seems to be held to mark the Korean war – not surprising, since officially the Soviet Union was not a participant.<sup>9</sup>

Outside Pyongyang, it is rare to come across any commemoration of any aspect of the war. Given that most of the North Korean military successes were in the South after the conflict began in June 1950, this is not surprising. For the Korean People's Army, most military action in the North was confined to retreating in the face of the UN advance from September-November 1950. The subsequent counter-attack from November 1950 onwards was largely a Chinese effort, as North Korean forces regrouped and rebuilt. While North Korean forces did take part in later fighting, this was in the largely stalemate conditions that prevailed from summer 1951 until the armistice. Areas where fighting then took place are still today, on both sides of the demilitarized zone, within militarily restricted areas.

A museum marking alleged United Nations atrocities, as usual presented as United States forces only, has been built at Sinch'on in South Hwanghae Province. Foreign visitors, especially groups that are regarded as friendly, are taken to visit. In the vicinity, a variety of murals/posters shows one of the alleged massacres, with women and children being forced off a bridge and then machine-gunned in the water.<sup>10</sup> Even this museum appears to date only from 1998, and its creation may reflect the re-discovery of an alleged massacre at Nogun-ri in South Korea. Otherwise, while guidebooks list revolutionary sites and battlefields associated both with Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the Korean War goes uncommemorated and unmarked. Wartime cemeteries that are known to have existed once have long since disappeared, often, it seems, built over in the 1950s as North Korea industrialised.<sup>11</sup>

In some ways, the war is far more marked in South Korea than it is in the North. There are many war memorials, mostly around Seoul where the heaviest fighting took place in 1950 and 1951. They include a British one, dating from 1957, and others commemorating Dutch, Australian and New Zealand forces. Oddly enough, only the United States appears to be missing. Some battle sites are marked, including some defeats. Inch'on makes much of General MacArthur's successful amphibious landing in September 1950, but not many miles away, the unfortunate Task Force Smith, hastily assembled in Tokyo in June 1950 and unsuccessfully thrown into Korea to help stop the North Korean advance, has its monument outside Suwon. There has been a United Nations cemetery at Pusan since the end of the war, and even though it is closely pressed by the expanding city of Pusan, it is still

lovingly cared for by both its custodial staff and local children.<sup>12</sup> Citizens of the Republic of Korea who died in the war are commemorated in the National Cemetery in Seoul. That said, there is something of the same low-key treatment of the anniversary in the South as in the North. 27 July is not a national holiday, and there are no parades or special ceremonies. Even at the truce village of Panmunjom, not much is made of the armistice. Attention is instead focussed on North Korean atrocities and infiltration attempts. Perhaps since the actual area where the armistice was signed is in the North, as are the table and other relics, this reticence is understandable.

Curiously enough, it was not until 1994 that South Korea opened its War Memorial, which now stands in Yongsan-ku, an area that is very much the military centre of Seoul. Like its Australian counterpart, to which it seems to owe some of its inspiration, this is both a war memorial and a museum. Before its construction, a privately organised museum devoted solely to the Korean War functioned on Yoido Plaza, not far from the National Assembly building. It was very much the inspiration of one man, Kap Chong-chi, who devoted much of his life to activities involving both South Korean and foreign Korean War veterans.<sup>13</sup> Once the decision was made to erect an official museum, Mr. Kap was instructed to remove his exhibits, which are now displayed in the south of the country.

Although the War Memorial is clearly strongly linked to the Korean War, that is not its sole function. Indeed, the museum seems not wholly at ease with the Korean War, which is not the biggest section of the museum. Instead, it attempts to build up a long Korean military tradition, stretching back into antiquity and forward to South Korean involvement in the Vietnam War. Given that the military tradition is not one of Korea's strong points, there are times when the museum seems to struggle with its remit, and the whole project has been the subject of some opposition.<sup>14</sup>

The real problem of course is that despite the claims on each side about victory, the armistice in 1953 was not a victory for anybody. At best, three years of war had done nothing more than confirm the division of the peninsula. In reality, both sides lost. The armistice itself was the product of two years hard and bitter negotiations, with each side trying to wrong-foot the other. The course of the negotiations was marked

by long interruptions during which savage fighting continued right to the last minute. Not surprising, therefore, that at the time of the signing, contemporaries noted that there was no rejoicing, no celebrations. This was not a victory but only a pause.<sup>15</sup>

The war had huge effect on the peninsula.<sup>16</sup> Three million Koreans were killed, wounded or missing, while 10 million families, one third of the population of the peninsula, were broken up. Thirteen million Koreans, or 43% of the population in 1950, were directly affected by the war. The damage was particularly fierce in North Korea, which bore the brunt of the fighting after September 1950, and which was effectively without air cover except in certain remote areas. According to US statistics, the United States' Air Force used 386,037 tons bombs, 32,357 tons napalm, 313,600 rockets, and 167 million machine gun rounds against the North. The war had also been marked by atrocities on both sides.

In 1953, the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung said that the country's economy was totally destroyed. It had lost 8700 industrial plants, 370 chongbo (906,500 acres) of farmland, 600,000 houses, 5000 schools, 1000 hospitals and 260 theatres (sic). In 1953, the North's national income was 69.4% of that of 1950; electricity production 17.2% of 1949, and coal 17.7% of 1949. There had been a huge loss of able-bodied men either killed or who fled South.

South Korea was also in a bad way. It had lost 17,000 plants, businesses, and factories, 4000 schools, 600,000 homes, and GNP declined by 14% in the war. Total property damage was estimated at US \$2 billion, or the same as GNP in 1949. Effectively, therefore, apart from the end of the fighting, both sides found themselves in the summer of 1953, with nothing to mark and nothing to celebrate. For both North and South Korea, others had won many of their successes in battle. What do you celebrate if your existence has been saved by outside intervention, whether by the United Nations or by China, and your hopes of achieving a reunified peninsula have been thwarted by those same saviours? No wonder neither side makes much of the armistice.<sup>17</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In reality, despite the pictures shown regularly on Western television, it has been some years since the North Koreans have had such parades.

<sup>2</sup> BBC News at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/asia-pacific/3092151.stm>, 24 July 2003, and [/3101231.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/asia-pacific/3101231.stm), 29 July 2003.

<sup>3</sup> This section draws on both Stanley Gibbons Stamp Catalogue, Part 18, *Japan & Korea*, London: Stanley Gibbons Publications Ltd., 3<sup>rd</sup>. edition, 1992; and *Korean Stamps 1945-1998* (Pyongyang: Korean Stamp Corporation, 1999), a full colour catalogue.

<sup>4</sup> *The Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum*, Pyongyang: Fatherland War Museum, 1979, new edition 1989. A folding leaflet.

<sup>5</sup> For example, *Panmunjom*, NP: Korean People's Army Publishing House, n.d.; *Panmunjom*, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Press Group, 1996; both purchased at Panmunjom. There are a number of different editions available, but the format remains the same.

<sup>6</sup> It is illustrated and described in a little pamphlet on sale in a number of languages, reproduced from the *Korea Pictorial*.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Springer, *Pyongyang: The Hidden History of the North Korean Capital* (Budapest: Entente Bt., 2003), pp.54-55; *Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum*.

<sup>8</sup> Springer, *Hidden History*, pp. 89-90, 141.

<sup>9</sup> For Soviet involvement in the air war, see Jon Halliday, "Air Operations in Korea: The Soviet Side of the Story", in William J. Williams, ed., *A Revolutionary War: Korea and the Transformation of the Postwar World*, (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1993), pp. 149-170.

<sup>10</sup> See the website "constructed by members of the Juche Idea Study Group of England with the invaluable fraternal assistance of the Society for Friendship with Korea of the UK", at <http://uk.geocities.com.sinchonri>; the website is not yet (January 2004) complete.

<sup>11</sup> Information supplied, on condition of anonymity, by a member of the United States' Department of Defense's Missing in Action team, Pyongyang, summer 2002.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief note on the UN Cemetery, see James Hoare and Susan Pares: *Conflict in Korea: An Encyclopedia*, (Santa Barbara, California, Denver, Colorado and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1999), p. 194. An even briefer note can be found in Pusan History Compilation Committee, *The History and Culture of Pusan*, (Pusan: City of Pusan, 1993), p.275.

<sup>13</sup> The museum gets brief mentions in some older guidebooks, such as Korea National Tourist Corporation, *Seoul City Guide* (Seoul: Ahn Graphics, rev. ed. 1987), p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> A recent book examines this theme in some detail: see Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 117-140.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Frank H.H. King, “Korean Armistice”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 August 1953.

<sup>16</sup> For much of the following, see B. C Koh, “The War’s Impact on the Korean Peninsula”, in Williams, *Revolutionary War*, 245-262.

<sup>17</sup> Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building*, p. 117.

## **The British Press and the Korean Armistice: Antecedents, Opinions and Prognostications**

Gordon Daniels

North Korean forces crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on 25 June 1950, barely five years after the end of the European War, and less than five years after Japan's surrender; a time when the realities and perceived 'lessons' of the Second World War remained close presences in the minds of British politicians and journalists. Prime Minister Attlee, Foreign Secretary Bevin and leader of the Opposition Churchill had all been colleagues in the wartime coalition cabinet.<sup>1</sup> Thus the notion that cross-border aggression by dictators constituted the greatest threat to peace was widely accepted. This concept was often linked to the hope that collective security – through multilateral treaties or the United Nations – would preserve peace and international order.

Britain's experience of two world wars, and centuries of colonial and commercial activity, made her leaders and commentators deeply aware of distant Asian issues. These were seen as interlinked to global rivalries, not as fragmented local difficulties. Furthermore Britain's concession of independence to India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma, her defence of Malaya against Communism, and her colonial development schemes, led many politicians, journalists and officials to believe that Britain had a sensitivity to Asian nationalism which others had not. For some, particularly on the political left, Britain's recognition of Communist China, in January 1950 was further evidence of this sensitivity – if the Chinese Revolution was interpreted as a nationalist, as well as a Communist, triumph.

It was against this background that much of the British press greeted and welcomed United States, and soon after, United Nations action to defend the Republic of Korea. Less than a year before, in August 1949, *The Times* had claimed that no such 'full scale attack was at all likely.'<sup>2</sup> But when the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was crossed it declared that the conflict was 'much more than a civil war,' rather it was a deliberate challenge to the United States and the United Nations in a place only a hundred miles from occupied Japan.<sup>3</sup> *The Times* was not the only serious organ to support American action, and British approval of it. *The Economist* declared 'The leaders of the free world have shown that they have the will to resist aggression, that they are

ready to run risks now to stop militant Communism from picking off its victims one by one.<sup>4</sup> However this writer cautioned 'The purpose of the action is limited....The purpose is to stifle the explosion...not widen the area of conflict.' (U.N.) 'forces will not operate north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel... proof...that this is a defensive... operation.'<sup>5</sup>

*The Times*, like Churchill and Attlee saw Communism as a global threat. It also placed much blame on Moscow for giving its blessing to Pyongyang's attack. Nevertheless, as early as July 1950 the interdependence of non-Communist states, and the problem of limited resources both became significant themes in *The Times*' commentaries. One writer now called for 'better Atlantic defence,'<sup>6</sup> while the implications of the Korean conflict for global political strategy became a recurring theme in British writing. In August a *Times* leader writer pointed out that Russia would be suited if 'China became embroiled' in the war and the United States was pulled away from the Middle East and Europe.<sup>7</sup>

By November 1950 MacArthur's United Nations forces had advanced far beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and faced Chinese troops near the Manchurian border. This led *The Times* to again express fears that United States and European forces would be drawn away from Europe, with a corresponding weakening of Western defence.<sup>8</sup> As Chinese 'volunteers' advanced southward apprehension grew that conflict with China could spread well beyond the Korean peninsula. Such fears were deepened by President Truman's suggestion, on 30 November, that the use of nuclear weapons was not impossible.<sup>9</sup> In this atmosphere of crisis Prime Minister Attlee flew to the United States to seek reassurances regarding American intentions. According to *The Economist* these Anglo-American conversations resolved a 'crisis of confidence'<sup>10</sup> but these talks indicated another sphere in which global anti-Communist policy was indirectly threatening the condition of the allies. Already raw material shortages, and rearmament programmes were driving up the prices of important commodities. This trend was deeply troubling to British leaders who were acutely aware of their balance of payments difficulties. In response to these concerns Truman and Attlee agreed to 'jointly distribute existing supplies of raw materials' in the common interest and 'jointly set about increasing these supplies.'<sup>11</sup> However, this agreement suggested the establishment of a complex quasi-planning mechanism, which would be extremely difficult.

By the end of 1950 newspapers such as *The Times* saw that events in Korea might now be linked to Chinese Communist claims for membership of the United Nations, and control of Formosa (Taiwan). Clearly, Chinese military intervention in Korea had drastically damaged Sino-American relations, making any such concessions unacceptable to Washington.<sup>12</sup> Conversely these new issues provided ready grounds for left-wing press attacks on American policies. Such attacks were to continue with increasing ferocity following the return of the Conservative Party to power in October 1951. American plans for economic sanctions against China also disturbed British journalists who feared that Sino-American tension might provoke a military attack against Hong Kong or at least damage its trade.

In late February 1951 *The Times* again presented somewhat cautious views, suggesting that United Nations troops should not re-cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>13</sup> In May following MacArthur's dismissal, this far from radical journal joined left-wing critics in attacking the behaviour of the deposed Supreme Commander.<sup>14</sup> By this time *The Times* had come to modify its military proposals and favoured a limited United Nations advance to the waist of the Korean peninsula.<sup>15</sup>

In July 1951 truce talks finally began between American and Communist military negotiators. This was a forum unlike the United Nations – where Britain had no significant influence. Furthermore the British press had no meaningful access to Chinese or North Korean political processes – which were key factors in the talks. Communist writers in the London *Daily Worker* suggested that they understood what lay behind Chinese actions, but their writings were often little more than eulogies of Chinese Communist conduct. Less rigidly committed journalists such as *Times* leader writers could speculate more freely. Would there be a Chinese offensive to coincide with the Japanese peace conference in San Francisco? Were periods of military calm a cover for a likely 'larger and wider explosion'?<sup>16</sup> Yet mere speculation could generate little detailed or substantial thought.

Nevertheless by October 1951 the certainties or near certainties of the past were clearly fragmenting. Earlier notions of Stalin as supreme puppet master were complicated by China's central importance in the war and its diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> Even more disturbing was a new confusion in United Nations policy. Indeed, in October 1951 *The Times* suggested that China would not accept a ceasefire until the United Nations had clarified its own aims, and conveyed these to the Communist side.<sup>18</sup>

Soon after – only sixteen months after the war's outbreak – it was being described as merely 'cruel and wasteful'. On 28 November 1951 *The Times* declared 'no one suggests that the United Nations should try to overwhelm North Korea to the Yalu'<sup>19</sup> It was now clear that 'the United Nations have every reason to seek a military armistice.'

Two months later, in January 1952 *The Times* took an even more critical view of the Korean conflict. It now described it as 'the Wrong War' which, far from stabilising a situation, threatened, indirectly, to undermine the French position in Indo-China.<sup>20</sup> Even more threatening was Senator Taft's talk of the need for a MacArthur style all-out war on Communist China. By now *The Times'* editorial staff were highlighting another complexity in the situation, the contradiction between the original U.N. objective – a unified Korea – and the need for more realistic aims. This dilemma was described as a conflict between 'collective security' and 'traditional diplomacy'.<sup>21</sup> Churchill apparently feared, as Attlee had done in 1950, that fighting in Korea could threaten a diversion of Western forces, from Europe and the Middle East. It was now being claimed – with little recognition of Japan's importance – that Korea was 'not vital to Western interests.'<sup>22</sup>

Throughout 1952 propaganda themes dominated news about Korea. Chinese charges of germ warfare evoked incredulity among contributors to *The Times*.<sup>23</sup> They were treated with the maximum possible credulity in the pages of the *Daily Worker*. Similarly, rioting by Communist prisoners in Koje provided further material for this pro-Communist organ – and created a measure of embarrassment in liberal newspapers.<sup>24</sup> Doubts about the West's commitment to South Korea were also deepened by the erratic behaviour of Syngman Rhee. *The Times* saw him as a 'most capable administrator' who was abusing his power.<sup>25</sup>

As American bombing of North Korea drew closer to the Yalu it became clear that Britain had no meaningful role in Washington's military decision making. In the continuing war London and Washington might be partners in name, but in very little else.<sup>26</sup> Despite Anglo-American differences, which were exploited by such open Communist supporters as the Dean of Canterbury, *The Times* praised the United States' conduct in the protracted truce negotiations. On 14 July 1952 its leader writer praised the Americans' monumental patience in participating in eight hundred hours of talks with adversaries who were not only Communists but 'also Orientals'.<sup>27</sup>

Despite China's increasingly powerful position in Korea, and signs that Moscow might be sympathetic to some form of truce, the suspicion remained that the Soviet Union could somehow benefit from continued fighting. Yet 1953 was to see significant political changes. On 5 March Stalin died, and as a truce in Korea seemed more likely, *The Times* began to discuss the uncertainties which an end to hostilities might bring. In a leading article entitled 'Economics of the Olive Branch' it noted that progressive developments in the truce talks, and the possibility of lower arms production, had already reduced some share values, and prices of raw materials. The possibility of rising unemployment and deflation now misted the international horizon.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the very proximity of a truce agreement focussed journalistic attention on the detailed conduct of the negotiations. When the leading American negotiator General William K Harrison, appeared to rule out a significant role for Asian states in post-truce mechanisms, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Worker* achieved a rare unity of view. Both criticized the heavy handed American negotiator. The *Manchester Guardian* went much further than criticism in suggesting that American military negotiations should be replaced by civilian diplomats – to improve the West's international reputation.<sup>29</sup> There was even the suggestion that British negotiators might have a useful role to play. This widespread criticism of Harrison recalled the strident attacks on MacArthur in the first years of the Korean War. One other allied figure frequently unified the British press in an unlikely manner: the South Korean leader Syngman Rhee. His release of Northern prisoners appeared to threaten both the truce process and the reputation of the allies.<sup>30</sup> Yet even Rhee had some journalistic support. In a skilfully argued contribution to *Punch* entitled 'Unfortunate Mr. Rhee', the Roman Catholic Conservative Christopher Hollis characterised the Korean leader as a quasi-Churchillian defender of South Korea's national interest, who merited respect.<sup>31</sup>

If the Korean War had been ended by a multilateral peace conference, perhaps Britain's role might have been significant and the comment of the British press might have been more substantial. As it was British journalists were merely commentators from outside, lacking detailed information or access to major negotiators. Nevertheless the truce of 27 July 1953 inspired diverse and interesting reflections.

Typical of comments on what seemed to be an interim settlement was the article 'Brighter Hope of Armistice' in the conservative *Daily Telegraph*. This stated 'Prospects of a lasting peace are as yet obscure and the hope of Korean unity may be insubstantial but a firm truce in Korea on honourable terms would not only be an immense advantage to the United Nations but also to the South Koreans themselves, who will deserve and receive large assistance in restoring their shattered country.'<sup>32</sup>

This mingling of political and economic issues was also apparent in the *Manchester Guardian's* leading articles 'Cease Fire' of 27 July and 'Trade in Peace' published two days later. The former declared. 'It is thirty-seven months since the North Koreans marched in, twenty-four since it became clear that neither side could win an outright victory and the truce talks began, and only two since the negotiators of both sides went into secret session and a truce at last became probable. The war ends almost where it began.'<sup>33</sup>

This liberal paper's recognition of the role of the United Nations was to be expected. It clearly commended the fact that this was the first time 'nations have come together to resist flagrant aggression.' It claimed that United Nations leadership had been essential and without this the struggle could not have come to a 'fair issue' – though the simple notion of 'fairness' in such a complex and tragic circumstance appears somewhat insensitive. Again, characteristically, the *Manchester Guardian* praised India's role in resolving the dispute over prisoners of war. President Truman was also complimented on his creative statesmanship, but Korea's ruined and still divided condition was also acknowledged. On 29 July the Guardian's leader writer brought an air of qualified optimism to its analysis of the economic future. It declared 'for the last three years production and trade all over the world has certainly been stimulated by rearmament and the supply of the fighting forces in Korea. If more peaceful conditions develop it will be impossible to keep spending on defence up.' This article also suggested that American voters would be unwilling to continue to support such high military spending. Conversely, it hoped that peace might bring an increase in trade, particularly between the Eastern and Western blocs. Overall the *Manchester Guardian* believed that a recession in the United States was less likely than in 1951 – though the sterling area might suffer from falling prices for such raw materials as rubber, tin, jute, sisal and copra.<sup>34</sup>

*The Financial Times* also expressed guarded optimism regarding the future. In 'After Korea' it claimed that international cooperation had halted aggression for the first time but 'only to contain it in a limited geographical area.' *The Financial Times* now perceived possible improvements in the economic situation declaring 'between March and June the Dow index had only fallen by twenty five points.' It also noted that the overwhelming importance of private industry in the United States suggested that government procurements were not the decisive determinants of its economic health. *The Financial Times* also questioned whether the prosperity of most Western states was solely based on arms production.

Like the liberal *Manchester Guardian* it hoped for the expansion of East-West trade and 'especially trade with China.' For the *Financial Times* the prolonged nature of the truce talks had itself made a positive contribution to prosperity. It commented 'they have enabled the immediate economic effects of the cease fire to be spread over several months and its more remote effects to be considered without haste.' More than anything else the *Financial Times* noted that the truce in Korea would add further to the easing of international tension which was, in part, symbolised by the death of Stalin.<sup>35</sup>

The Sunday newspaper, *The Observer*, also recognised that the truce agreement would contribute to a more general improvement in international relations.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the realities of military *realpolitik* were expressed, most directly by the conservative *Daily Telegraph*. In 'Truce at Last in Korea' it stated:

'Massive bombing has made North Korea a liability to Communist China and Chinese troops have suffered a rotation of demoralising martyrdom from the air.' Recognising the real element of force which lay behind the truce it declared 'nothing the enemy can do will induce the United Nations to abandon their stricken and heroic ally.'<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to these severe, if accurate judgements the *Daily Worker* saw the agreement as a triumph for the masses.<sup>38</sup> On the day following the truce it reprinted the statements of various left-inclined religious and cultural leaders who were advocates of peace. These included the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, the Reverend Donald Soper and the distinguished Irish dramatist Sean O'Casey. O'Casey was quoted as saying 'The thing now is for war everywhere, in Indo-China, Kenya, Malaya to go back to hell.'<sup>39</sup>

This celebration of the truce proved extremely short. Within a week the *Daily Worker* accused John Foster Dulles of plotting to restart the war.<sup>40</sup> In contrast more moderate left-wing newspapers remained positive. The *News Chronicle* saw the truce as a symbol of a worldwide change in Communist policy; a development which might lead to a truce throughout Asia. It also called for restraint in any criticism of the United States.<sup>41</sup> The Labour Party newspaper the *Daily Herald* looked beyond the truce to a broader process of pacification in which recognition of the People's Republic of China would be a creative element. It declared 'China must be admitted to the UN at the earliest possibility. There can be no hope of a settled world relationship while that great country is kept out of the Council Chambers.' Labour anti-Americanism and sympathy for a perceived egalitarian regime in China combined to fuel such suggestions.<sup>42</sup>

Not surprisingly few could imagine that such a lengthy and expensive conflict would be followed by something as anti-climactic as a simple truce. Even *Punch* in its lilliputian characterization of the condition of the peninsula 'Breathing Space' suggested a possibility of future change.<sup>43</sup> However, it was the strongly pro-American *Economist* which tried hardest to prise open the future. In a sense this magazine perceived something which most other newspapers had failed to see - the immense power of leaders of small countries in critical situations. Syngman Rhee was a notable example.<sup>44</sup> More concretely *The Economist* looked towards a political conference which was expected to follow the cease fire. For all its political sophistication this journal saw diplomatic recognition of Beijing as nothing more than something which would suit the Kremlin's book.<sup>45</sup> The possibility that recognition might help in the collection of data or in engineering Sino-Soviet friction seemed beyond its contemplation.

*The Economist* clearly recognised how difficult the mechanics of a post-truce conference might be. Obvious problems included the construction of an agenda, and deciding which states should be constituent members. Perhaps *The Economist's* pessimism was too dark in suggesting that Turkish or Colombian aspirations could be significant obstacles to progress.<sup>46</sup> Its journalists were, however, perceptive in depicting the blurring which had entered policy making towards Korea. One contributor declared:

'The United Nations have been fighting in theory for the conception of a united Korea; no one at any rate outside the Communist capitals, intended in 1945 that Korea should be permanently divided. With the recent implacable Communist opposition in the North...it had come to be thought that some form of partition was the only workable solution – until Mr. Syngman Rhee made it clear during the past few weeks that the South would not accept a permanent division. Hence, if the allies are going to discuss the future of Korea, it is now clear – that they must go into the conference committed to unity...Yet...since the actual union of North and South does not at present look like being feasible, some formula may have to be found which while accepting union in principle, still does not make peace dependent on its being put into practice immediately.'<sup>147</sup>

Despite all these subtleties and complications *The Economist* saw the successful truce talks as a possible model for the future 'filing down of a great mass of disagreement into the smooth and polished page of compromise.'<sup>148</sup> Unfortunately this was not to be.

Whatever its failings the British press in its serious corridors, sought manfully to interpret the political and economic complexities of the Korean War and its aftermath. These included such unprecedented features as U.N. military action and the fighting of a limited war. In failing to provide a formula for successful Korean reunification the British press merely reflected the icy realities of the peninsula.

## Endnotes

1. Both Herbert Morrison and Anthony Eden who served as Foreign Secretary in the later phases of the Korean War had also been members of the wartime cabinet.
2. 'The Korean Republic', *The Times* 18 August 1949
3. 'War in Korea' *The Times* 26 June 1950
4. 'Test Case' *The Economist* 1 July 1950 p.1
5. 'Test Case' *The Economist* 1 July 1950 p.2
6. 'Halting Aggression' *The Times* 6 July 1950. 'American Answer' *The Times* 24 July 1950
7. 'Korea and Formosa' *The Times* 18 August 1950
8. 'China and Korea' *The Times* 10 November 1950
9. Brian Catchpole, *The Korean War*, Constable, London 2000. pp. 96-97
10. 'Success of a Mission' *The Economist* 16 December 1950 p. 1061
11. 'Success of a Mission' *The Economist* 16 December 1950 p. 1062
12. 'Strategy in Asia' *The Times* 21 December 1950
13. For Chinese issues see 'China and the United Nations,' *The Times* 20 January 1951.  
  
'Parliament Meets' *The Times* 23 January 1951. Regarding crossing the parallel see 'The 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel' *The Times* 28 February 1951
14. 'The General's Recipe' *The Times* 12 May 1951
15. 'Korea' *The Times* 26 May 1951
16. 'Bad News' *The Times* 24 August 1951  
  
'Dangerous Suspense' *The Times* 8 September 1951
17. *Punch* was somewhat slow in appreciating these changes. Illingworth's cartoon 'Left Hand, Right Hand' *Punch* 17 December 1952 p. 729 showed Stalin as a puppet master manipulating events in Austria, Indo-China, Malaya and Korea. China's diplomatic role was finally acknowledged in Illingworth's cartoon 'Chinese Composition' *Punch* 6 May 1952 p. 535
18. 'War and Peace in Korea' *The Times* 1 October 1951. 'Heartbreak Ridge' *The Times* 11 October 1951
19. 'Heartbreak Ridge' *The Times* 11 October 1951. 'Next Steps in Korea' *The Times* 28 November 1951

20. 'Still the Wrong War' *The Times* 28 January 1952
21. 'Cross Purposes' *The Times* 5 February 1952
22. 'Report on Washington' *The Times* 30 January 1952
23. 'Germ Warfare' *The Times* 20 March 1952 A typical cartoon on this theme was 'Germ Warfare' by Illingworth. *Punch* 25 June 1952 p. 753
24. 'Korean Prisoners' *The Times* 23 May 1952
25. 'Korean Scandals' *The Times* 31 May 1952
26. 'The Yalu Raids' *The Times* 26 June 1952
27. 'Korean Negotiations' *The Times* 14 July 1952
28. 'Economics of the Olive Branch' *The Times* 14 April 1953
29. 'General Harrison' *Manchester Guardian* 1 May 1953. *Daily Worker* 1 May 1953
30. 'Dr. Rhee Acts' *Manchester Guardian* 19 June 1953  
 'The Korea Threat' *Daily Herald* 24 June 1953. 'Rhee's Threat' *The Scotsman* 25 June 1953  
 'Divided We Fall' by Illingworth. *Punch* 24 June 1953 p. 731
31. Christopher Hollis 'Unfortunate Mr Rhee' *Punch* 19 August 1953 p. 231
32. 'Brighter Hope of Armistice' *Daily Telegraph* 20 July 1953
33. 'Cease Fire' *Manchester Guardian* 27 July 1953
34. 'Trade in Peace' *Manchester Guardian* 29 July 1953
35. 'After Korea' *Financial Times* 28 July 1953
36. *The Observer* 26 July 1953
37. 'Truce at Last in Korea' *Daily Telegraph* 27 July 1953
38. *Daily Worker* 28 July 1953
39. *Daily Worker* 28 July 1953
40. *Daily Worker* 1 August 1953
41. *News Chronicle* 29 July 1953
42. *Daily Herald* 28 July 1953

43. 'Breathing Space, The Korean War June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953' *Punch* 5 August 1953 p. 179
44. 'Lessons from Mr Rhee' *The Economist* 4 July 1953. pp 3-4
45. 'End of a War' *The Economist* 1 August 1953 p. 303
46. *Ibid.* p. 304
47. 'End of a War' *The Economist* 1 August 1953. p. 304
48. *Ibid*