THE FIFTY YEARS WAR

The United States
and the Soviet Union
in World Politics, 1941-1991

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COLD WAR

The Far Eastern dimension, 1945–1953

ASIA AND EUROPE COMPARED

It was relatively easy for policy-makers in the United States and the Soviet Union to arrive at definitions of their interests in Europe. Having by 1948 abandoned the attempt to produce a joint and comprehensive settlement, they sought to stabilize their influence within their respective spheres of interest. Their methods of control differed greatly, but geography, history, and the needs of the moment combined to make division the least unacceptable alternative to open conflict. The Iron Curtain was as much a psychological as a political barrier. It defined the limits of the possible with painful clarity, particularly after the Soviet acquisition of the atom bomb. The bomb raised the potential costs of a breach in the line by either side, with the result that mutual antagonism was displaced into the nuclear arms race, the propaganda war, and the espionage war.

Each of these closely related spheres of conflict thrived on stalemate in the central political theatre, creating an adversarial frame of mind which entered deep into the cultures of the West. Fears of atomic war issued in a burgeoning disarmament literature and a body of apocalyptic novels and films which had precedents in the writings of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells but which now had a new sense of reality and urgency. Fear of communism fed the vogue in the 1950s for revelatory docudramas about the fight against subversion and for Hollywood's science fictional representations of nameless threats from outer space which were defeated only by a combination of an affirmation of Western values and massive technological know-how. Spy novels and films joined the techniques of detective fiction to the *frisson* supplied by reality itself: reports of defection and betrayal, and revelations about the techniques of espionage. While it is true that these genres thrived on the deceptiveness of appearances, hidden dangers, and possibility of annihilation, the ultimate sources of fear could be identified; they lay in the machinations of international communism. More particularly, the stalemate in Europe provided the international backdrop for these projections of national fears. It became a given of the international scene, a focus for

the reinforcement of the West's cultural identity in contradistinction to that of the 'East'.

However, the real East – lumped together in the Western mind for centuries as 'the Orient' – was less amenable to the methods used to make sense of the situation in Europe. The lines between hostile and friendly territory were rarely as clear as in Europe both in the geographical and political sense. There was no single 'Bamboo Curtain' in Asia comparable with the Iron Curtain in Europe. While the 38th parallel dividing North and South Korea and the Taiwan Strait dividing Communist from Nationalist China came to mark boundaries in Asia between communism and capitalism, in many other parts of Asia the lines were far less clear. Attempts to establish similar lines, for example on the 17th parallel between North and South Vietnam, proved ultimately impossible to sustain. In Indo-China and the rest of Asia, in so far as the situations within individual countries were reducible at all to the terms of the cold war, the lines of conflict were as varied in their nature as were the nations themselves. Western, and particularly American, attempts to press Asian conflicts into the mould of the cold war fell foul of this diversity.

After Stalin's death the Soviet Union pursued a more flexible line, often backing anti-Western and non-aligned rather than communist states and groups within states – a consequence, in part, of relative weakness in projecting itself globally and, in part, of its historical pragmatism. Both superpowers in any case experienced difficulty in applying policies devised for Europe to situations in Asia and the Third World. The geopolitics of European conflict allowed for, indeed invited, a concentration of interests; the geopolitical diversity of Asia produced multiple spheres of interest and posed the problem for both superpowers of achieving coordination amongst them.

Underlying these problems was the pressure within Asia for radical political change. The growing movement for independence among former European colonial territories eventually produced a situation not unlike that in East-Central Europe between the world wars: an increasing number of more or less unstable states, subject to a greater or lesser extent to the desires of the Great Powers to create order in the service of their own interests. The difference in Asia in the post-war period lay not only in the sheer number of new and would-be new states but in the nature of their historical ties with the Great Powers and in the nature of the international situation in which they sought to achieve independence. Colonial dependence had created little scope for indigenous political activity, however successfully cultural institutions and values had survived the onslaught of the West. This ensured that decolonization would involve nation-building from the ground up, meaning a necessary concentration on internal consolidation at a time when international economic and political forces were exerting powerful external pressures on new states. It was a potent mixture of forces. In these circumstances, internal political conflict frequently turned Asian and other Third World nations into arenas for superpower rivalry, not least because many of the revolutionary movements adopted communism, or versions of it, as their guiding philosophy.

The overriding economic imperative was modernization. This must be achieved, wrote a liberal Western economist in 1955, 'because Western influence has wiped out the old economic system and has vastly increased the birth rate. The choice now is: modernize or perish' (Ward [1955] 1962: 57). But which route to modernization: the capitalist or the Soviet communist model? The Soviet model was preferable to many Asian leaders both because the Soviet Union was not associated with the legacy of Western imperialism and because it offered an example of how 'a nation can drag itself up by its own bootstraps . . . without any intervention or help from the West' (Ward [1955] 1962: 73). But there were limits to the applicability of the Soviet model. Whatever the success of the Soviet Union in forcing the pace of industrial growth through its five-year plans, agriculture remained a problem sector in the Soviet economy and hardly offered a promising example to Asian nations whose economies were based pre-eminently on agriculture. Furthermore, even those nations, such as China, which did adopt communism as a national ideology developed the system in their own ways, subsequently establishing a rival communist model for Third World growth. Finally, former colonial nations, such as India, many of whose leaders had been educated in the English-speaking world, rejected communism for political and social as well as economic reasons.

Perhaps the overriding difficulty faced by Third World nations was that of establishing the necessary political stability on which to build economic growth. Regional, ethnic and religious differences within newly independent states undermined the consensus on which national growth would depend. Civil war was an ever-present possibility. 'Most of the political violence that has inflamed human society since 1945', observes Richard Barnet, 'has been of a special character:

> Its source has not been conflict between states, but conflict within societies. The wars of our time have not been primarily fights for territory, raw materials, colonies or the preservation of the King's honour, although all of these have at some time been involved. Essentially, contemporary wars have been fights for the rights of various political groups within the former colonial appendages of Europe to take political power and to exercise it on their own terms.
>
> (Barnet 1972: 15–16)

It is only necessary to add that 'exercising power on their own terms' was limited not only by internal conflict but by the ambitions of former European colonial powers and the superpowers. Newly independent states possessed neither the cushion of time nor distance enjoyed by the United States in its period of nation-building. Globalism was the inescapable condition of Asian and Third World growth.

DEFINING SUPERPOWER INTERESTS IN ASIA

The language of NSC 68, as we have seen, was global, but limitations of resources and the primary concern at this stage with Europe combined in practice to create a

hierarchy of interests in the minds of American policy-makers. Prior to the Korean War Asia came low on the list of American priorities. In a Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Paper of April 1947 on 'United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security' countries were listed according to two criteria: 'importance to our national security' and 'urgency of need'. When considered separately, the first criterion produced the following outcome:

1. Great Britain
2. France
3. Germany
4. Belgium
5. Netherlands
6. Austria
7. Italy
8. Canada
9. Turkey
10. Greece
11. Latin America
12. Spain
13. Japan
14. China
15. Korea
16. The Philippines

(Etzold and Gaddis 1978: 79)

When the two criteria were combined, however, Japan moved up to eighth place, the other countries remaining broadly in the same positions.

Two important points emerge from this document: the primacy in the eyes of the JCS of Japan among the Asian nations and the low significance in terms of US national security accorded to Korea and China. Of Korea it was felt that 'if the present diplomatic ideological warfare should become armed warfare, Korea could offer little or no assistance in the maintenance of our national security. Therefore, from this point of view, current assistance should be given Korea only if the means exist after sufficient assistance has been given the countries of primary importance to ensure their continued independence and friendship for the United States and the resurgence of their economies.' Of China it was said that, while a communist China would pose serious problems, even in the event of war with the Soviet Union, it might be possible to isolate communism in the Far East by means of an economic quarantine of China (Etzold and Gaddis 1978: 78–9).

Of course, the leading assumption behind this document was that war against communism meant war with the Soviet Union, which indicates that at this stage American thinking about Asia was dictated by the European situation. The decisive change over the next three years, brought about by the revolution in China and the beginning of the Korean War, was towards the perception that war against communism would not necessarily begin in the central European theatre and spread out to the periphery, but could well begin on the periphery. This did not obviate the need for the strongest possible defences in Europe, but it did expand the sphere of American interests and commitments. As we shall see shortly, the Europe-first policy of the period 1945–50, essentially a continuation of America's priorities during the Second World War, came under severe attack within the United States as the cold war was extended to Asia.

In so far as it is possible to ascertain Soviet interests in Asia in the aftermath of the Second World War, it would appear that until Zhdanov's 'two camps' speech of 1947

the Soviet Union was cautious in offering support to communist movements, but thereafter shifted towards open and unequivocal denial that former colonial territories could adopt a position of neutrality in the struggle against imperialism. Asian communist parties were urged to take an oppositionist line rather than join with non-communist nationalists to form united fronts in independence movements or governments in newly independent states. In part this was determined by growing expectations of a communist victory in China and in part by the outbreak of cold war in Europe. But this policy also reflected Stalin's memory of what has been described as his 'disastrous experience' of supporting the non-communist Nationalist movement in China in the 1920s (Nogee and Donaldson 1988: 149). Under Comintern guidance in 1925 the Chinese Communist Party had entered into alliance with the Nationalists under the leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek, who was waging a struggle to unite China under his rule. In 1927, however, once victory was in sight, Chiang turned on the Communist Party, slaughtering thousands of its members.

The legacy of this experience dictated that Stalin would press communist parties in Asia to uncompromising opposition to 'bourgeois' rule. This led to communist insurrectionist movements in the Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, and Malaya in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as these countries achieved or moved towards independence. (They gained independence respectively in 1946, 1948, 1949, and 1957.) There seems little reason to quarrel with the judgement that this policy involved Stalin in a 'sterile conflict with the first new states', and this included India which demonstrated its independence from the West in Nehru's attempt to mediate in the Korean War (Lowenthal 1964: 326).

In the long run this policy proved self-defeating and following Stalin's death was abandoned. Its pursuit, however, at a crucial divide in relations with the United States raised the stakes of the cold war. It inclined the United States to see in all Asian insurgent movements the hand of the Soviet Union. Above all, it encouraged the process by which the United States would come to interpret conflict in Asia less in terms of threats to its security as such than in terms of global cold war between East and West. Clearly the two are intimately related, but one of the striking features of American policy in Asia over the whole post-war period is the difficulty experienced by policy-makers in justifying military intervention in countries which did not obviously pose a threat to American security. Vietnam was the most significant case, but that lay in the future. Meanwhile, attention was focused in 1950 on North-east Asia – China, Japan, and Korea.

McCARTHYISM AND THE FAR EASTERN TURN IN AMERICAN POLICY

Truman was politically vulnerable in the early months of 1950. The twin blows of the Soviet atom test and the Chinese revolution had shaken public confidence in the administrations's policies, exposing it to charges of negligence and worse. The

conviction of Alger Hiss for perjury in January 1950 seemed to confirm suspicions that the Truman and Roosevelt administrations had harboured traitors in key policy-making positions. Hiss had worked at the State Department during the 1930s, had been a member of the American delegation at Yalta, and after the war had been appointed president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The specific charge against him was that he had perjured himself before the House Un-American Activities Committee in denying that he had passed information to the Russians while employed at the State Department in 1937–38. (Thanks to the Statute of Limitations he could not be charged with espionage as such.) In actuality Hiss's role had been a minor one, but the case became a convenient peg on which critics of the Truman administration could hang a series of accusations, amounting to a comprehensive denunciation of the whole Roosevelt–Truman record in foreign policy.

For figures such as Senator Joseph McCarthy, who rose to prominence in the wake of the Hiss conviction, the case provided an explanation for the succession of American defeats in the cold war, beginning with the 'sell-out' of Eastern Europe to the Soviets at Yalta and culminating in the 'loss' of China. No note is more consistently sounded in McCarthy's speeches than his belief in America's 'impotency' in the face of communism, 'the feeling of America's weakness in the very air we breathe in Washington'. The present situation could only be accounted for as the product of 'a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man'. Alger Hiss's cultured, urbane demeanour, his association with the east coast liberal elite, and his deep roots in Roosevelt's New Deal offered easy targets for Republican attacks on the betrayers of true Americanism and heralded the end of bipartisanship on foreign policy within Congress. Dean Acheson, George Marshall's successor as Secretary of State, blackened the Democrats' record still further when he announced, following the conviction of his old friend, that 'I will not turn my back on Alger Hiss.' With this statement, said McCarthy, 'this pompous diplomat in striped pants, with a phony British accent . . . awakened the dormant indignation of the American people' (Matusow 1970: 22, 59, 26). For four years McCarthy pressed home his message, throwing the administration on to the defensive and ensuring that the communist issue would dictate the agenda of domestic affairs.

McCarthy did not invent anti-communism. His genius was to dramatize the issue, to put his personal imprint upon it by a combination of adroit self-publicity and unscrupulous exploitation of the media's appetite for sensational copy. His targets were many – the State Department, the Democratic Party, and subsequently the army and the presidency. By 1954 he had become an embarrassment to his own party. Republicans who had been content to go along with McCarthy's attacks on the Democrats, especially for their handling of the Korean War, balked at his increasingly indiscriminate charges against such hallowed institutions as the army and the (now Republican) presidency. In 1954 he was censured by the Senate and effectively silenced. Within three years he was dead, a broken man mired in alcoholism.

There are many contexts in which McCarthy and McCarthyism can be viewed. A

rich literature on the political and sociological roots of the American anxiety about communism began to appear within months of McCarthy's censure by the Senate. From the standpoint of foreign relations, however, the significance of McCarthy's career lies in the coincidence of his brief period of notoriety with the shift of attention from Europe to the Far East, a shift which he helped to promote. Two figures appear repeatedly in his catalogue of traitors – George Marshall, who had attempted in 1946–47 to negotiate a truce between the Nationalists and Communists in China, and Owen Lattimore, an oriental scholar who had also been an adviser to Chiang Kai-shek during the Second World War. Both, it was claimed, had been instrumental in the disastrous policy of denying adequate support to the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang, hence paving the way for the Communist victory of 1949. The Korean War would never have happened, it was argued, if the Truman administration had given due attention to the danger of communism in the Far East rather than devoting its resources to Europe in the crucial years after 1945.

Once again, McCarthy was not the initiator of the 'Asia first' view. Its roots lay in the controversy over the United States' wartime Europe-first strategy and gained powerful advocates within Congress and among prominent publishers and businessmen in the immediate post-war years. Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, was an ardent supporter of the Chinese Nationalists and a critic of the Truman policy of seeking to resolve the civil war in China by bringing the Nationalists and Communists together. Madame Chiang, a Christian with close ties to American businessmen and legislators, lobbied energetically on behalf of the Nationalist cause both before and after the Revolution. Within Congress Senator Knowland's role in this cause was such that, following the Nationalists's flight to Formosa (Taiwan), he was dubbed 'the Senator from Formosa'. The links which the Asia firsters and the China lobby managed to forge between the communist threat in Asia and inside America had profound effects upon the future of America's involvement in the Far East. It ensured that diplomatic recognition of Communist China would remain off the agenda for a long time to come, in fact until 1978. It removed from office the cream of America's China specialists in the purge of the State Department which followed the Chinese Revolution. It also encouraged a heightened sensitivity to the dangers of further losses to communism in Asia. Thereafter compromise or accommodation to Asian communism was tantamount to abject surrender.

CHINA AND THE FERMENT IN ASIA, 1945–1950

The Asia firsters' contention that the Truman administration had lost China is justified only if one accepts their premise that China was America's to lose. This view was based on the romantic notion that the United States had a record of benign concern for China, stemming from the 'Open Door' notes of 1899. In opposing the European nations' plans to parcel up China in line with their own economic interests, the United States, it was felt, had demonstrated an enlightened concern for China's

territorial integrity. While extensive cultural and educational ties did exist between the United States and China, in actuality the United States had done little to enforce the principle of the open door, which in any case could be seen as a self-interested claim for an economic stake by a latecomer on the Chinese scene. In other spheres too China had little reason to feel beholden to the United States. Discriminatory American immigration laws and maltreatment of the Chinese population within the United States had been a constant source of friction from the 1880s onwards. Nor did successive American administrations do much to aid China in the face of Japan's growing aspirations to dominance in the Far East. With the (admittedly reluctant) support of the United States, Japan gained concessions in the Shantung Peninsula at China's expense at the Treaty of Versailles (1919); the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (the northern province of China) in 1931 produced only verbal protests from the United States; and when full-scale war broke out between China and Japan in 1937 Roosevelt shrank from imposing sanctions on Japan.

American policy towards China changed substantially with the deterioration of American–Japanese relations in 1940–41. Indeed the cause of this deterioration was increasing encroachment by Japan on China as well as on Southeast Asia. In this sense the United States' 'special relationship' with China was a late development; too late, it might be said, given that China was burdened with internal conflict in addition to the war with Japan. Having once made the decision to build up China as a major power by including her in the councils of the anti-Axis nations, the United States was confronted by the problem of supporting a leader – Chiang Kai-shek – whose hold on power was distinctly fragile. The central issue for American policy-makers in the wartime and immediate post-war years was their attitude towards the relations between the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists.

Contradictory advice was reaching Washington from China as the war drew to a close. Ambassador Hurley (appointed in January 1945) advocated unreserved support for Chiang. In so far as Hurley conceded a role at all to the Communists it was to be wholly on Chiang's terms. Meanwhile counsellors within his embassy, such as John Stewart Service and John Paton Davies, doubted Chiang's ability to produce stable government and were critical of his dictatorial style. Ironically, McCarthy's *bête noire*, Owen Lattimore, held a more favourable view of Chiang than many other old 'China hands', perhaps because he had worked as Chiang's political adviser during the war. (However, contrary to McCarthy's claim, Lattimore was never a State Department employee and exerted influence after his post with Chiang during the war primarily through his writings.) In a widely read book published in 1945 Lattimore wrote that Chiang was not at present 'losing control'. Nevertheless he felt that there was a case for political compromise with the Communists. The Communists, he wrote, 'have done well enough in the territory they control to stand comparison with the Kuomintang [Nationalists]' (Lattimore 1945: 122). Hurley was incensed at signs of what he took to be pro-Communist learnings among the Embassy staff, and on 26 November 1945 he resigned in protest. 'It is no secret', he wrote in a letter of resignation to Truman, 'that

the professional foreign service men sided with the Chinese Communist armed party . . . Our professional diplomats continuously advised the Communists that my efforts in preventing a collapse of the National Government did not represent the policy of the United States' (Kahn 1975: 174–5).

In truth the policy of the United States government was more ambiguous than Hurley believed or desired. It was essentially one of 'wait-and-see', though with a definite tilt towards the Nationalists (Stueck 1981: 36). In 1946 Truman dispatched General Marshall to China supposedly to mediate between the Nationalists and the Communists and to encourage the formation of a coalition government. After a largely fruitless year Marshall returned empty-handed. (He, in common with John Paton Davies, John Stewart Service and other State Department China specialists, subsequently paid dearly for his efforts at the hands of McCarthy, who in 1951 launched a 60,000-word diatribe against him in Congress, later published as a book – see McCarthy 1951.) By 1947 the United States had resolved on a course of recognition of the Nationalist government, coupled with moderate military and economic aid. As the civil war raged and the Communists advanced, aid to China was gradually scaled down and in January 1949 the American Military Advisory Group was withdrawn. The climax of the civil war coincided with the Berlin Blockade, and the prospect of a Communist victory in China did not seem to weigh heavily enough to warrant a large allocation of military resources (Dulles 1972: 31–2).

By the early months of 1949, as a Communist victory seemed imminent, angry Republicans produced a 'round robin' letter in Congress accusing Acheson of 'irresponsibility' in his China policy, and followed it up by introducing a series of China aid bills in Congress with the aim of pressuring the administration into action. These efforts achieved partial success, since the administration needed Congressional support for continuance of aid to Europe under the Marshall Plan. A moderate package of assistance to Chiang was passed as an amendment to a European aid bill. It would appear, however, that by the middle of the year the administration was more or less reconciled to a Communist victory in China and was bracing itself for the inevitable reaction within the United States. In August the State Department published the China White Paper, a lengthy history and justification of American policy accompanied by extensive documentary evidence. In the appended Letter of Transmittal from Acheson to Truman it was argued, to the consternation of the administration's critics, that 'the ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the government of the United States' (Department of State [1949] 1967, Vol. 1: xvi). That this was no more nor less than the truth did not mollify Truman's opponents, who believed that the policy of heavily qualified support for Chiang had been a self-fulfilling prophecy. A new set of battle lines was thus drawn around the related question of recognition of Mao's China and the United States' attitude towards the Nationalist regime which at the end of the year fled to the island of Formosa.

Non-recognition of Mao and unequivocal support for Chiang was by no means a foregone conclusion. For one thing, this policy would incur the risk of war in support

of Chiang, and neither Truman nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff favoured such a course. A strong lobby within the State Department argued for a 'realistic' policy of recognizing whoever was in control. (Britain recognized Mao's government in 1950, albeit sending only a chargé d'affaires rather than an ambassador.) The scales were tipped away from Truman's preference for disengagement from the China conflict by the influence of McCarthy and the Asia firsters, as we have seen, but more decisively by a sequence of international events during 1950: the signing of a treaty between China and the Soviet Union in January, the North Korean attack on South Korea in June, and the entry of China into the Korean war in October.

From the United States' point of view the first of these confirmed their worst fears about the scale of the threat posed to the West by communism. In fact, however, Sino–Soviet relations before and after the Revolution were more complicated than Americans were able to perceive. For one thing, the Soviet Union had been noticeably lukewarm in its support for Mao's Communists since 1945, continuing to recognize the Nationalists as the legitimate government of China until as late as mid-1949. This policy was apparently based on doubts about whether Mao possessed the power to unify China under Communist rule and possibly also an overestimation of the Nationalists' strength and the level of American support for them. Moreover, the Soviet Union had been able to achieve important territorial ambitions in China without the aid of the Communists. At the Yalta conference, and subsequently in a treaty with Nationalist China, the Soviet Union regained rights in China which it had possessed prior to the Russo–Japanese War of 1904. These included use of the commercial port of Dairen and the naval base at Port Arthur in the northern Yellow Sea between the Korean peninsula and the Chinese mainland, and control of the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian railroads, which formed the Soviet Union's links to its Pacific coast. A Nationalist-run China thus held out certain advantages for the Soviet Union.

Finally, even after the decision was taken in mid-1949 to throw firm support to Mao, the Soviet Union, as one account has it, 'took pains to deny Mao Zedong's authorship of the Chinese strategy' (Nogee and Donaldson 1988: 94). Given the Soviet experience with Tito, it can be assumed that Stalin harboured suspicions of a large and independent centre of communist power. Certainly it would appear that the hand of friendship was extended only so far to the Chinese Communists. On his arrival in Moscow to negotiate the Treaty of Alliance, Mao was met at the airport, not by Stalin but by Molotov. Mao's visit was also short by comparison with those of other communist leaders. China certainly emerged from the Revolution and from the alliance negotiations as a power to be reckoned with, but, so far as the Soviet Union was concerned, as a decidedly junior partner. Mao appeared to acknowledge this in his declaration in July 1949 that 'the Communist Party of the USSR is our best teacher from whom we must learn,' but there was no question of the Soviet Union establishing the same position of dominance over China which it wielded over the nations of Eastern Europe (Daniels 1985, Vol. 2: 183).

The terms of the Treaty itself, which was signed in February 1950, were finely balanced. On the one hand, Stalin undertook to return to Chinese control those rights to Port Arthur, Dairen, and the Manchurian railroads which he had gained at Yalta. On the other hand, the handover was not to be immediate and was to be dependent upon conclusion of a Chinese treaty with Japan. Furthermore, Mao's hope for substantial economic aid was not realized, though he did gain some. Perhaps the most important clauses of the Treaty, however, concerned the mutual security guarantees in the event of aggression from Japan 'or any other state that may collaborate in any way with Japan in acts of aggression' (Text of Treaty in Grenville and Wasserstein 1987: 165). The Treaty has been described as 'in essence a propaganda instrument condemning the danger of a Japanese military revival' (Lowe 1986: 121). Doubtless the Soviet Union's main gain in the Treaty, and the feature which compensated for the territorial concessions, was the addition to communist political and military power in the Far East in the face of the consolidation of American power in Japan. Before looking at the way in which the Korean War affected the calculations of the major powers we must consider the role of Japan in American policy after 1945.

THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF JAPAN

In many respects Japan's place in American Asian policy paralleled that of Germany in Europe. Early designs for a punitive settlement were quickly shelved as it became clear that communism was on the march in Asia. Initially the reconstruction of Japan was based on the need to remove the entrenched elites and institutions which had given rise to militarism in the 1930s. Democratization of the political system, dismemberment of the family-based industrial monopolies (or *zaibatsu*), and the elimination of Japan's capacity to produce heavy industrial goods (including, of course, war material) were all aimed at uprooting authoritarianism and encouraging a wider distribution of wealth and power. To a degree each of these policies was embarked upon but, as Michael Schaller has observed, they gradually 'lost momentum or changed direction in 1948' (Schaller 1986: 51). The *zaibatsu* essentially survived efforts to break them up and the new constitution, while establishing formal democracy and liberal principles, allowed ruling conservatives to retain their position. The plan to de-industrialize Japan was never realized since it soon became clear, as was the case in Germany, that a weak and unstable Japan would invite communist inroads and would undermine America's broader goal of setting up a counterweight to communism in Asia. The change of policy towards Japan coincided with the mounting of the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine. Japan became the keystone of containment in Asia.

The development of the occupation policy in Japan bears directly on the administration's reluctance to get involved too deeply in the internal affairs of China. The United States was able to exert control over the Japanese situation to an extent which it was not able to do in China. Indeed the United States insisted from the outset that the Soviet Union should have only a nominal role in the occupation of Japan, a point

which the Soviets exploited to the full in their claim for a similar role in the Balkans and Eastern Europe (Schaller 1986: 58–61). Though it would be going too far to say that the administration viewed China as expendable, it is the case that Japan was increasingly regarded as the strategic key to the American position in Asia. From the evidence of PPS and NSC documents in 1948–49, policy was formulated in anticipation of the fall of the nationalist regime, and the recurring theme is the danger of an extensive commitment to preventing its defeat (see documents 25–34 in Eztold and Gaddis 1978).

When in January 1950 Dean Acheson announced the 'defensive perimeter' which the United States must be prepared to defend in Asia, it excluded not only Formosa but also Korea. America's policy in Asia was an offshore policy, reflecting the prevailing conventional wisdom that the United States should resist being drawn into a land war in Asia. In the event, the North Korean attack not only undermined this policy but also removed any obstacles to the conclusion of a peace treaty with Japan, formally ending hostilities and establishing Japanese independence. Ironically, as Schaller points out, the North Korean attack 'set the stage for the termination of the Occupation' (Schaller 1986: 290). Any qualms about reaching a separate peace with Japan were now brushed aside. Though the Treaty was signed amid the trappings of an international conference in San Francisco in September 1951 (attended also by the Soviet Union), its provisions – which included a security pact and the granting of base rights to American forces – reflected largely bilateral interests between the United States and Japan. The Soviet Union refused to sign.

THE KOREAN WAR

Much obscurity surrounds the opening of the Korean War, in particular the question of Soviet motives. Western observers assumed that the Soviets had engineered the North Korean attack, encouraging the North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung, to achieve by force what negotiation had failed to achieve since the temporary partition of Korea in 1945 – namely, the reunification of Korea (Foot 1985: 58–9). Khrushchev, on the other hand, asserted in his memoirs that 'the war wasn't Stalin's idea, but Kim Il-sung's', though Stalin 'didn't try to dissuade him' (Khrushchev 1971: 368). Recent scholarship, based on new evidence from Soviet archives, supports the view that the idea for the invasion was Kim's but that the North Korean leader actively sought and received the endorsement of the Soviet Union. While there is as yet no conclusive evidence explaining the Soviet decision, it would appear that a strong motive was concern not to be seen to be doing less than the Chinese in promoting the cause of revolution in the Far East. In the event of a Soviet refusal to give help to the North Koreans, Stalin's 'position as leader of the communist camp', it has been pointed out, 'would be weakened while the authority of Mao, to whom Kim would obviously turn . . . would rise'. In any event, it seems clear that Kim's policy of reunifying the peninsula by force represented a more militant position than Stalin had wished for. Of

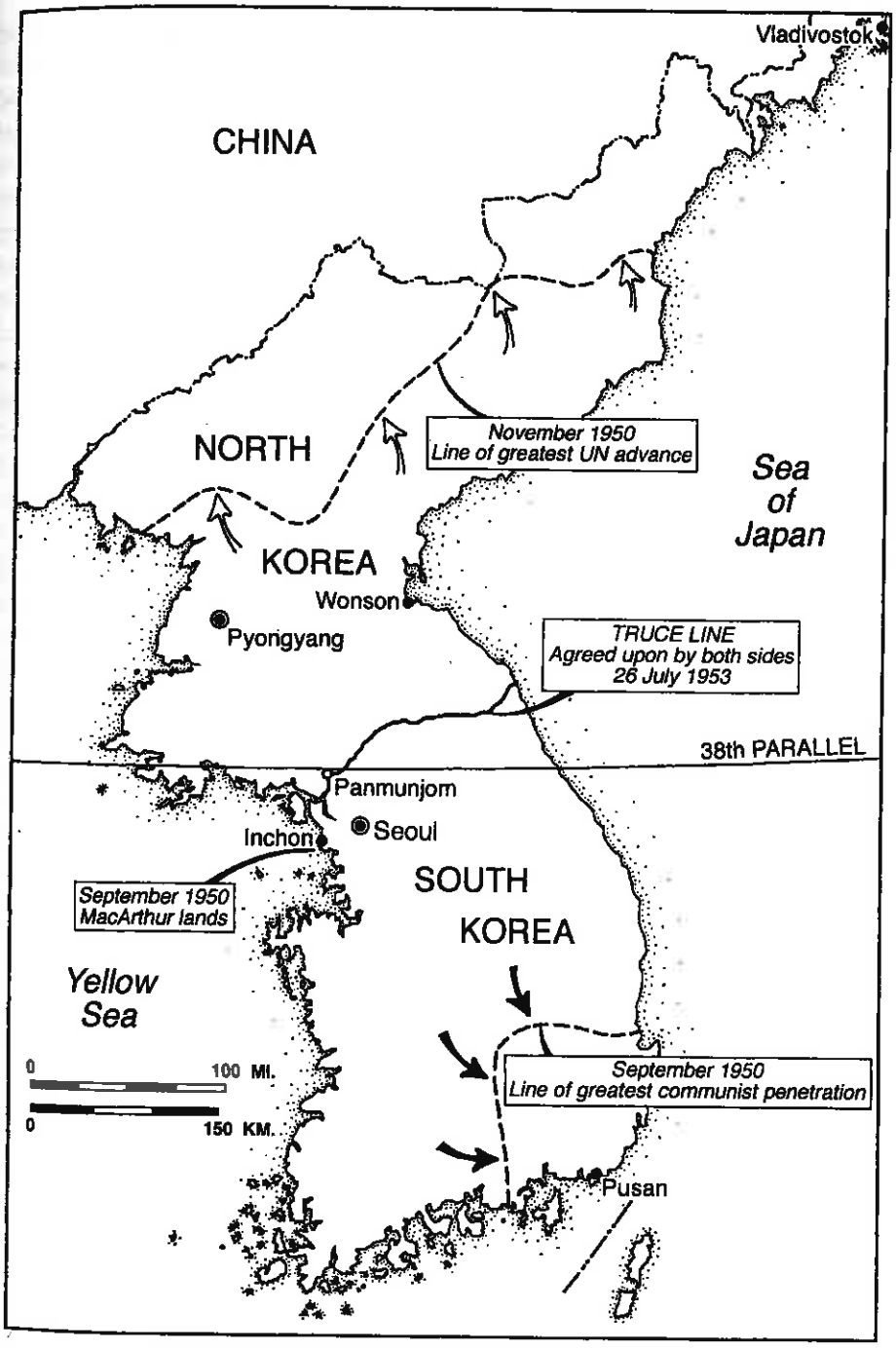

Figure 5.1 Military phases of the Korean War
Source: Derived from R.H. Ferrell (ed.), *America in a Divided World, 1945–1972*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975.

particular significance here was Stalin's concern about potential American reaction. Stalin reportedly approved Kim's plan 'only after having been persuaded that the US would not intervene in the conflict' (Weathersby 1993: 30, 31–2). That the United States did intervene meant that the Soviet Union was drawn into a larger commitment than it had contemplated.

A further puzzle is the Soviet boycott of the UN Security Council at the critical moment in late June when the Council made the decision to label North Korea as the aggressor and to support military moves by the United States to repel the invasion. Several more or less subtle explanations have been offered. Stalin may have wanted to embroil the United States in conflict with China, thereby ruling out the possibility of Communist China being admitted to the UN. On this view, Soviet policy was driven by fear of a large rival communist power. The problem with this explanation is that the Soviet Union had been boycotting the UN since January 1950, nominally at least, precisely because of the United States' opposition to Communist Chinese membership of the UN. Besides, a policy of seeking to isolate China would seem to sit oddly with the treaty which Stalin had signed with Mao only six months earlier.

Another suggestion is that 'Stalin may have hoped that cloaking American intervention in the UN flag would destroy this body or at least would reveal it to be an American tool' (Halliday and Cumings 1988: 78). The problem here is that by August 1950 the Soviet representative had returned to the UN and was using its position on the Security Council to obstruct American initiatives. The simplest and most plausible explanation has been offered by Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister at the time. Reportedly indignant at what he took to be an insulting letter from the United States government to the UN Security Council on the subject of Korea, Stalin simply acted on angry impulse. 'On this occasion', wrote Gromyko, 'Stalin, guided for once by emotion, had not made the best decision' (Gromyko 1989: 102).

It seems safe to say that the Soviet Union had no master plan and that it was making policy 'on the hoof'. The swiftness of the American response threw Soviet policy-makers into some confusion. After all, only six months earlier Secretary of State Dean Acheson had given the impression that the United States did not consider Korea an area of vital interest. Furthermore, it appears that the Soviet Union soon 'regretted the North Korean invasion, were eager to distance themselves from it, and to prevent any widening of the war'. It was doubtless this which led the Americans, assuming as they did that China would act in concert with the Soviet Union, to discount the possibility of China acting on her own in support of the North Koreans (Hastings 1987: 142).

As it happened, the Truman administration showed little hesitation in revising its assumptions about involvement in a land war in Asia. Within a few days of the North Korean attack the United States had committed ground troops to the defence of South Korea, pushed a resolution through the UN Security Council labelling North Korea as the aggressor, and interposed the 7th fleet between Formosa and the mainland in order to prevent an attack by the People's Republic of China. Militarily the course of the war fluctuated wildly in the first few months. The initial push by the North Koreans took

them deep into the South by the middle of September and left only a corner of the peninsula beyond their reach. General MacArthur, seconded from his post as occupation commander in Japan, responded with an outflanking amphibious landing at Inchon, a port half way up the west coast, and within a month had retaken Seoul and driven the North Koreans back to the line dividing North and South Korea at the 38th parallel. MacArthur's military success raised the question of America's political aims – whether to re-establish the *status quo* or to revise it by reunifying Korea?

The division of Korea had followed the pattern of Germany since 1945 – provisional partition following the removal of the Japanese wartime occupation forces, failure of the United States and the Soviet Union to agree on means of unification, and the establishment of separate governments in North and South. The initial UN resolution on the Korean War envisaged only the restoration of the 38th parallel, but the success of MacArthur's northward drive held out the inviting prospect of reunification by force of arms. Containment, it appeared, was giving way to 'roll-back' as Truman endorsed military operations north of the 38th parallel and gained UN approval for it. At this point the character of the war changed. Ignoring Chinese warnings that they would intervene if the Americans continued north towards the Korean border with China, MacArthur pushed further north, reaching the Yalu river by the end of October. As promised, and clearly against all the expectations of the Americans, the Chinese entered the war and by the end of the year had forced the UN forces into a headlong retreat down the peninsula to a point south of the 38th parallel.

Three considerations appear to have weighed with the Chinese in their decision to join the North Koreans. The first was simply the threat to Chinese security posed by the possibility of a reunified Korea under Western auspices on their border. Secondly, several thousand North Korean volunteers had fought with Mao's army in the civil war with the Chinese Nationalists, and support for Kim Il-sung in 1950 can be interpreted as recompense for this assistance. Finally, it has been suggested that Mao saw an opportunity to enhance Chinese influence in North Korea at the expense of the Soviet Union and to establish Chinese claims to Great Power status in the region (Halliday and Cumings 1988: 113). Doubtless the most important of these reasons was the first. From the beginning of the war China had been warning the United States, in public speeches and via the Indian Ambassador in Peking, that they could not accept the presence of hostile troops so close to their border. American indifference to these warnings and subsequent talk among some Americans of carrying the war beyond the Yalu river into China itself can only have increased Chinese anxieties. China does not seem to have been eager to enter the war, not least because it could not fight it without substantial military aid from the Soviet Union, thus increasing its dependence on its ally. This might tend to cast doubt on the view that Chinese entry was predicated on the aim of replacing Soviet influence in North Korea.

Truman's response to the Chinese entry was a combination of strident verbal aggression against China – including a hint that the United States reserved the option of using the atomic bomb – and a strategic retreat to the initial goal of

restoring the 38th parallel. Truman's aggressive rhetoric aroused deep anxiety among America's UN allies. The British Prime Minister, Attlee, rushed to Washington in early December to express his dismay at the direction of American policy. In a series of conversations with Truman, Attlee urged him to open negotiations with Peking in order to avoid an all-out war with China. Though the Truman administration ceased making public atomic threats, Attlee failed to convince Truman and Acheson that a less belligerent policy towards China might cool the situation in Korea and also encourage a split between Peking and Moscow. The United States was now too committed to Chiang and to the view that accommodation to communism in one sphere meant capitulation everywhere to find Attlee's arguments acceptable.

In practice, however, Truman was as concerned as Attlee to avoid all-out war with China. Without conceding Attlee's point about the possible advantages for policy in Asia in general of negotiating with China, he acknowledged the narrower point about the danger of an all-out war. A serious obstacle in the way of this policy was General MacArthur, whose bellicose pronouncements and evident desire to extend the war into China became a serious embarrassment to Truman. Though it could be said that MacArthur was simply following through the logic of the decision to press forward north of the 38th parallel, after the Chinese entry the costs of that policy looked to Truman to be excessive. By April 1951, with MacArthur now back at the 38th parallel, eager to cross it once again onto the North, Truman ordered his recall. Containment was re-established as the reigning orthodoxy.

Having escaped one set of costs, however, by ruling out war with China, Truman then incurred another – the storm of protests within the United States which greeted his dismissal of MacArthur. At a time when Senator McCarthy's attacks on Truman were at their most strident, MacArthur returned to the United States as a conquering hero denied his booty, to be fêted by Congress and public opinion. Whether these protesters would really have welcomed a war with China is open to question. It was enough that MacArthur offered a sounding board for public frustration with the conduct of the war. As the front stabilized around the 38th parallel, military stalemate ensued, though at enormous cost in casualties. It was two years before negotiations, continually stalled over the issue of the return of prisoners of war, brought a conclusion to the conflict.

The political costs of the Korean War to Truman and his party were substantial. The military stalemate ensured that the presidential election of 1952 would be fought in part on the issue of the war. The Democrats suffered a severe defeat, both in the presidency and Congress, while the Republican candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, was able to exploit his great prestige as a military leader to advantage. Declaring during the election campaign that, if elected, 'I will go to Korea', he was able to convey the impression that his presence alone would ensure the ending of the conflict.

In fact, between Eisenhower's inauguration in January 1953 and the conclusion of the armistice in late July some of the bitterest fighting of the war took place. Manoeuvring by both sides, including desperate efforts by the South Korean leader,

Syngman Rhee, to obstruct the negotiations, stretched out the war. The conclusion of the armistice has often been attributed to the American threat, conveyed to the Chinese by the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, via the Indian Prime Minister, that they would employ the atomic bomb unless the North Korean side was prepared to come to a peace agreement. Doubtless this threat played a role, though equally important was the death of Stalin in March 1953, which brought the more accommodating Malenkov to power. Discussions at Stalin's funeral among Chinese, Soviet, and North Korean leaders may have resulted in proposals which broke the deadlock on exchanges of prisoners of war. Increasing American pressure on Syngman Rhee also played its part, though in the event Rhee continued to do all he could to sabotage the negotiations and ultimately refused to sign the armistice agreement when it was concluded. This proved to be only one of a succession of instances in which 'pro-Western' leaders would exploit American anti-communism for their own ends, forcing the Americans to choose between becoming tied to political leaders of questionable value or bypassing them and assuming the direct commitment of containment themselves. In this case the United States assumed a massive direct commitment. The outcome in the long term was a kind of stability which bore a curious resemblance to the situation in Europe: a divided country, whose stability was guaranteed less by the character of the South Korean government than by the fact that the United States, the Soviet Union and China all had their own reasons for wanting the continuance of the *status quo*. The overriding reason was the perception that the attempt to change it would involve the possibility of a major war. We shall see in Chapter 10 why the same conditions did not obtain in Indo-China.

Understanding the policies and interests of the participants in this complex of events is not easy. Korea has been described as a 'limited war', an exemplary case of containment in action. But, as we have seen, it also illustrates the fine line in American policy between containment and rollback. The words used by Walter Lippmann to characterize Soviet intentions in the cold war seem to apply equally well to the United States in the case of Korea: 'They will expand the revolution, if the balance of power is such that they can; if it is such that they cannot, they will make the best settlement they can obtain for Russia and the regime in Russia' (Blum 1985: 505). The best the Americans could obtain in Korea was a return to the lines which existed in 1950. It was not in all respects, however, a return to the *status quo ante*, since it was associated with deepened commitment to holding the line in Asia generally. The geo-strategic and ideological assumptions which had led to the original formulation of containment in Europe were now firmly adopted in Asia. These included the 'domino theory' – that a loss of one country to communism would set up a chain reaction in its neighbours – and the belief that, by whatever devious route, all manifestations of communism were to be traced to the activities of the Kremlin.

There is, to be sure, evidence to suggest that some within the American administration were aware that the differences between Peking and Moscow might be

exploited to America's advantage. Perhaps Mao could be considered a potential 'Asian Tito'. It has been argued that, contrary to the common view that American policy-makers considered the Soviet Union and China as a monolithic bloc, the Americans pursued a 'wedge through pressure' strategy with the aim of provoking a split between the two communist powers. Pressure on China, it is suggested, was exerted in order to push them into making demands on the Soviet Union for aid which the Soviets would be unwilling to satisfy (Gaddis 1987: 152–94; Foot 1985: 237–8). While this may have been the long-term aim, in the short term it is arguable that the strategy had the opposite effect. Moreover, within American public opinion, as opposed to government circles, it seems clear that the combination of the Sino–Soviet Treaty and Chinese entry into the war intensified the assumption of monolithic communism. In short, from the American point of view the Korean War had the effect of reinforcing the bipolar conception of the world already established in the antagonism with the Soviet Union in Europe.

The war also deepened American anxieties about the insidious and subversive character of communism. The evidence that considerable numbers of American prisoners of war had been 'brainwashed' by their communist captors provoked two sorts of reactions. One led to heightened fears of the devilish and inhumane nature of, in particular, Asian communists. The other led to much soul-searching about the shallowness of young Americans' adherence to their own value system. Americans seemed to lack the solidity of belief which would enable them to resist the pressures of interrogation. Either way, the effect was to screw American ideological fervour a notch higher. It was under Eisenhower's administration that the words 'under God' were added to the pledge of allegiance to the American flag, a ritual which children performed every morning at school assemblies. Finally, the still undecided issue of whether the United States used germ warfare in the Korean War and the evidence that maltreatment of prisoners took place on the American as well as the Sino–North Korean side muddied the moral waters surrounding this war which already, because of its equivocal military outcome, failed to conform to classic notions of military victory (Halliday and Cumings 1988: 174–86). The moral simplicities of the fight against Germany and Japan were not to be reproduced in this first major military conflict of the cold war, despite efforts to present it in this light. The Korean War produced few films and novels in the heroic mould. The film and subsequent television series *M.A.S.H.*, the major celluloid memorial to the Korean War, was made in the Vietnam era and made little reference to the realities of the war in Korea itself. Nor did returning veterans from Korea find that their compatriots showed much interest in their experience of the war. 'The war', Max Hastings has written, 'seemed an unsatisfactory, inglorious, and thus unwelcome memory' (Hastings 1988: 409). Furthermore, as we have already seen, the war proved disastrous for Truman and the Democratic Party. If the Korean War represented a victory for the West – and it could be presented as such, given the original intention of containing communism – it was nevertheless of a highly equivocal sort.

For the Soviet Union also the war had important negative effects. Not only did the North Korean attack invite a powerful Western response in Korea itself, but it cemented the American commitment to the security of Japan and of Taiwan. The three years of the war also provoked a decisive build-up of American forces in Europe and prepared the way for the rearmament of West Germany. The prospect of reopening bargaining with the United States on the as yet uncompleted Second World War settlements on Japan and Germany was thus further reduced. Nor could the Soviet Union be entirely happy with the enhanced prestige of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite enormous losses of people and resources, the outcome of the war strengthened the PRC's hand *vis à vis* the Soviet Union, enabling it to ask for fulfilment of the terms of the Sino–Soviet Treaty of 1950 – above all the withdrawal of Soviet forces from the naval base at Port Arthur (Low 1976: 66). The PRC's renewed self-confidence was manifested in a growing predisposition to act independently, both in exerting pressure on Taiwan and in seeking influence among underdeveloped countries. The Korean war, it has been said, was 'pivotal in undermining the relationship between Peking and Moscow', though it was several years before their differences developed into an open split (Foot 1985: 27).

If there were 'winners' in the Korean War they were the leaders of North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan. The first two, albeit at enormous cost, and the last at virtually no cost, gained guarantees of their continued rule as a result of the interests of the Great Powers in maintaining the *status quo* (Halliday and Cumings 1988: 202–3). The Korean settlement proved surprisingly long-lasting. It outlived the end of the cold war in Europe, despite important changes along the way, including an as yet unfulfilled agreement, reached between North and South Korea in 1972, to seek reunification by peaceful means.

CONCLUSION

The extension of the cold war to Asia was, as in the case of Europe, a consequence of the shift in balance of power caused by the Second World War. It was a multi-layered process, involving fundamental changes both at the system level and the level of the nation-state. The vast expansion of Japanese power after 1940 cut a swathe through European colonialism, while the sudden demise of Japanese power in 1945 left three often contending forces in play: the superpowers, independence movements, and, not least, former colonial powers – pre-eminently Britain, France, and Holland – which sought either to re-establish colonial rule or to manage the road to independence in ways which safeguarded their interests.

Within this context the lines drawn in the Korean War were relatively clear when compared with, for example, Indo-China. Korea had been occupied by Japan from 1911 until 1945, with the consequence that its liberation did not involve the European powers directly. The conflict in Korea shaped up as an East–West confrontation and its resolution took the form which the cold war had taken in Europe, essentially of a

spheres of influence arrangement. Geography played a large part in the superpowers' perceptions of their interests in Korea. 'When the Americans took over from the Japanese the burden of Japanese defense,' Louis Halle has written, 'they took over, as well, the conflicts which that defense involved.' That included Korea, which, because of its proximity to Japan on the one hand and to China on the other, 'had been for centuries . . . a strategic point of the utmost sensitivity' in the historic conflict between the two major Asian powers (Halle 1967: 192, 193).

The Soviet interest was less tangible, but, given its ideological alignment with China and its resentment at exclusion from Japan, the Soviet Union too had an interest in 'containing' Western power in Korea. In this sense Korea formed the front line of the cold war in Asia.

In those Asian nations which had previously been subject to European colonial rule, however, the pressures were different. Cutting across the East–West divide were, firstly, the efforts of the former colonial powers to reassert their influence, producing conflict within the Western camp, and, secondly, the presence of powerful independence movements which aspired to a measure of detachment from Great Power influence. In Asia, and more generally in what came to be known as the Third World, conflict was not wholly contained within the framework of the cold war, despite the ambitions of the superpowers. In many instances the 'enemy', as far as newly independent or would-be independent nations were concerned, was not one or another of the superpowers but the cold war system itself.