

Stoltzfus (eds.), *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the US Military in Asia*, New York: The New Press, 1992. Two articles in this volume are devoted to South Korea: Bruce Cummings, "Silent but deadly: Sexual subordination in the US-Korean relationship", pp. 169-175; and Sandra Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, "Tong Du Chun: The bar system", pp. 176-179.

22 "Cho Chŏngnae: sangchŏbadŭn shidae, kuhan kwa pulkkot ŭi munhak" (Cho Chŏngnae: The literature of resentment and flame), *Munhak Chŏngshin*, December 1989, p. 52. Quoted in Uchang Kim, "The agony of cultural construction", in Hagen Koo (ed.), *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 193.

## Nationalism in East Asia 1948-53: British reactions to events in China, Japan and Korea

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The aim of this paper is to provide a concise comparison between British responses to manifestations of nationalism in East Asia between 1948 and 1953. British policy in China was shaped by the nature of British economic interests and by the manner in which Britain reacted to the growth of nationalism in the 1920s and after. While Britain's economic position declined relative to that of other powers from the late 19th century, sizeable investments remained and long established British firms like Jardine and Matheson, Butterfield and Swire and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank continued to pursue their activities, as did multinationals like Shell and Unilever.<sup>1</sup>

In 1945 attempts were made to restore the former pre-eminence of Shanghai as the great metropolis in East Asia. The treaty port era ended formally in 1943, as the culmination to acceptance of legitimacy of the case advanced by China since the May Fourth movement.<sup>2</sup> Yet the treaty port mentality lived on among expatriates, and this helps to explain their failure to grasp the full potential of Chinese communism when the CCP assumed power in Mainland China in 1949. Hong Kong was restored to crown colony status in 1945. The British Foreign Office had long viewed the Kuomintang regime of Chiang Kai-shek cynically: the KMT was seen as corrupt, incompetent and brutal. Chiang was perceived as preoccupied mainly by bolstering his power by any methods deemed suitable. British dislike was fuelled through resentment at the pressures encountered by Britain during the paper unification of China under Chiang's leadership in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chiang was xenophobic, reactionary and hostile to the arrogance of British imperialism. The US thought quite favourably of the KMT, with Chiang personifying the courage of the Chinese masses when confronted with the savage depredations of the Japanese. The caustic reports of General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell were

ignored for some time, but eventually Roosevelt joined Churchill in lamenting the failure of the KMT to play a positive role in defeating the Japanese.<sup>3</sup> The US, however, was tied to a policy of extending economic aid and political support to the KMT while endeavouring simultaneously to promote a government coalition between the KMT and the CCP.

Neither the British nor the Americans expected the rapid disintegration of the KMT in the latter stages of the civil war.<sup>4</sup> The events of 1948 and the first half of 1949 came as a shock, but it was all the more traumatic for the Americans, gripped as they were by the growing hysteria over containing communism.<sup>5</sup> It became clear in the first six months of 1949 that Britain and the US would have to determine reactions, as the mandate of heaven passed from the enfeebled grip of the KMT to the dynamic hold of the CCP. British officials were aware only vaguely of the nature of the CCP. Reports from China were analysed by the Foreign Office's leading expert in Marxism-Leninism, Guy Burgess (who was an even greater expert than his British colleagues believed).<sup>6</sup> The CCP appeared to be driven by a combination of fervent nationalism, disgust at China's backwardness, and Mao's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. British ministers and civil servants disliked Chinese communism, yet felt that it was less dangerous than Soviet communism and that it might not prove too difficult to achieve an accommodation with it. Mao's comments on the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in 1948 were not encouraging. Mao emphasized:

Imperialism... the enemy of the working peoples of all countries, is still strong. That is why the revolutionary forces in every country must be united and consolidated, why they must daily strengthen the united anti-imperialist front headed by the Soviet Union and why they must pursue a correct internationalist policy, for otherwise they can never be victorious.<sup>7</sup>

This could be regarded as rhetoric, but it could represent Mao's views more firmly than some in the West believed.

At the beginning of 1949 British officials, in exchanges with their American counterparts, began the lengthy process of contemplating recognition. The British intention was to foster candid discussions which would lead, eventually, to the pursuance of an agreed joint approach. Decisions were not urgent and time might allow American animosity towards Chinese communism to diminish. The Labour Cabinet was influenced by three objectives in particular: the wish to protect British economic interests, the hope that China could be separated from the Soviet Union, and the desirability of preserving harmony within the British Commonwealth, where the most important new member, India, harboured leadership aspirations in Asia and favoured early recognition of the communist government proclaimed formally by Mao on 1 October 1949.

In December the Cabinet decided that recognition would be accorded very shortly. *De facto* recognition had been granted in October, amidst

confusion in which the Foreign Office went further than originally intended, through reference to the establishment of the "Central People's Government".<sup>8</sup> The US was told that it would be futile and dangerous to defer recognition; this would push China further into Moscow's embrace and alienate Chinese communities within the British Commonwealth. Fundamentally recognition was a question of acknowledging reality: whether the fact was palatable or not, the CCP controlled virtually all of Mainland China and the KMT regime was a discredited rump, unlikely to survive in Taiwan for much longer. Dean Acheson, the US Secretary of State, published the China White Paper in August 1949, revealing starkly the extent of the Truman administration's weariness with Chiang's regime.<sup>9</sup> However, the rising apprehension in the USA over communist expansion, accentuated by the use of the "loss of China" by the Republican Party, rendered it impossible for the US to contemplate recognition.

Britain recognized the People's Republic of China in the first week of January 1950. It is instructive to assess the arguments for and against recognition at this time. The most compelling argument for moving swiftly was that the communists controlled almost all of Mainland China and there was no likelihood, despite the statements by Right-wing Republicans in the US, of the KMT reversing the events of 1948-49. The creation of a more positive relationship between Britain and China would be promoted though prompt recognition. As opposed to this, it could be argued that careful calculation over timing was crucial. The US would disapprove of British recognition and it might be wiser not to face the problems associated with this aspect until Britain was satisfied that China would reciprocate positively.

The expectation on the part of the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was that recognition would be greeted warmly in Peking and that improved relations could be accomplished with reasonable speed. He confessed disappointment when he met representatives from the China Association on 16 March: little had emerged from recognition, and Bevin reflected as to whether the Foreign Office had been correct in its recommendation concerning the timing of recognition. It might have been more sensible to defer recognition, but in deciding to recommend recognition he was influenced by awareness of the significance of Mao's visit to Moscow in December 1949, which made it desirable to demonstrate to Mao that there was an alternative to cooperating with Stalin.<sup>10</sup>

As to dealing with the Sino-Soviet relationship, the British approach was wiser than the American. Acheson referred undiplomatically to this in his famous speech of 12 January 1950, delivered at the National Press Club in Washington. He stated that the KMT had failed because of its own incompetence and not lack of foreign aid. The CCP secured power by annexing revolutionary nationalism. The Soviet Union pursued a policy of imperialist aggrandisement in the interests of the Soviet state: this was

diametrically opposed to China's interests.<sup>11</sup> Mao's aim, during his exchanges with Stalin, was to obtain assistance for China's economy and to secure a promise of Soviet aid in the event of conflict arising from what he perceived to be an aggressive America which was encouraging the economic (and perhaps military) revival of Japan. When he arrived in Moscow Mao underlined his wish for friendship with Russia but stressed that China was a great country and, by implication, conveyed that China could not be treated in the manner of the satellite states of Eastern Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The duration of Mao's stay - seven weeks - and the arrival of Chou En-lai for the concluding phase of negotiations indicated that problems existed and that the talks were not to be bracketed with the customary brief visits by communist leaders from Eastern Europe who arrived in Moscow to be told what they must sign. Mao was conscious of China's great past and that he led a movement at least equal in importance to that led by Lenin and Stalin. However, he had inherited a bankrupt economy amidst a potentially dangerous situation in Asia (and, indeed, the world): thus agreement with Stalin must materialize. Sino-Soviet accords were signed in Moscow on 14 February 1950 - a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, and agreements relating to railways, Port Arthur and Dairen. The treaty provided for full cooperation against a revived Japan, for military action if either signatory were attacked and for economic assistance to China. The latter stipulated the basis of Soviet help, with China paying interest and supplying commodities.<sup>13</sup>

The Foreign Office believed that the Soviet Union gained most from the agreement. The signatories emphasized heavily the dangers presented by Japanese revival and extracted as much as they could from the propaganda contest in seeking to influence states and peoples in Asia and the Pacific worried by Japanese recovery. In the event of a Soviet-American war, Japanese bases would probably be used by the Americans and China would become involved. The financial arrangements were far from generous, although the difficulties facing the Soviet economy have to be remembered. While there was no obvious sign of tension in Sino-Soviet relations, the length of Mao's stay and the realities of two powerful communist movements facing one another suggested that friction existed.<sup>14</sup>

The principal diplomatic issue in Anglo-Chinese relations before the start of the Korean War concerned Chinese membership of the UN. The UN was dominated by the US in 1950 and there was no likelihood of Communist China gaining admission unless American policy changed. Britain was in a delicate position, having recognized the communist government but not wishing to antagonize the US. British policy rested on supporting Peking's admission to UN agencies but not voting in favour of China taking the seat in the Security Council occupied by the KMT regime. Mao's government regarded British manoeuvrings as another example of British subservience to Washington, and it affords additional evidence of the refusal of the Chinese

to go further in meeting the British. In August 1950 Britain voted in favour of Peking's admission to the Security Council but the fighting in Korea (in which China had not yet intervened) precluded a positive outcome. China had to wait another 20 years before displacing the KMT regime.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, before the outbreak of the Korean War, Britain's attempts to come to terms with revolutionary nationalism had made little progress. Sir John Hutchinson, *chargé d'affaires* in Peking, could not see the principal Chinese leaders and was restricted to discussions with lower-level officials. These discussions were usually courteous but limited. The best that could be hoped for at the beginning of June 1950 was incremental progress, but a hardening of American policy on Taiwan, communicated to the British early in June, represented an ominous stormcloud on the horizon.<sup>16</sup> Difficulties caused by the Korean War will be considered below.

Japanese nationalism caused fewer problems in 1948 than it had in the 15 years preceding August 1945. Japan was governed under allied occupation, which meant essentially American occupation. In 1945 British ministers and officials expected to have influence on the functioning of the occupation, but neither the Truman administration nor General MacArthur wanted Britain (or any other ally) to play a significant role in Japan.<sup>17</sup> The Allied Council for Japan and the Far Eastern Commission formed a basis for allied participation, but MacArthur regarded the ACJ with open contempt and paid as little heed as possible to communications from the FEC.

British ministers and officials took a more critical view of the Japanese than the Americans and feared that Japanese nationalism could again cause concern in the not too distant future. The more jaundiced British attitude was the product of several factors: the traumas resulting from the catastrophic events of 1941-42, symbolized by the surrender of Singapore, the atrocities inflicted by Japanese and Korean guards in the prison camps, a certain resentment at having been displaced by the US as the chief power in dealing with Japan, and a hard bitten cynicism as to whether American reformers could place Japanese society on a stable and non-violent foundation. However, as far as Japan was concerned, the British were closer in approach to the head of the allied occupation, General MacArthur, than they were to the Truman administration.

MacArthur revealed genuine dedication to reform when he became SCAP in 1945.<sup>18</sup> He and his leading colleagues developed a potent sense of mission to purge Japan of such dangerous features as militarism, state Shinto, excessive power for capitalism and an ambiguous constitution placing undue emphasis on an emperor-centred state. Thus, improbably for a senior general whose political sympathies within the US lay with the Right Wing of the Republican Party, MacArthur was the advocate of eradicating the threat from the military and turning Japan into a non-violent society, encouraging the labour movement, purging capitalism and liberating women.

It was all the more ironical that MacArthur was castigated by the "Japan Lobby" in the US in 1948 for implementing "socialistic" policies in Japan.<sup>19</sup>

MacArthur harboured political ambitions and wished to succeed resoundingly in Japan so as to strengthen his claim to the Republican presidential candidacy in 1948 or 1952. However, it is misleading to see his work in Japan as a means, simply, of advancing to the White House: he was wholly sincere in his sense of mission in Japan. MacArthur lacked expertise in the economic sphere and it was the weak state of the economy in 1947-48 that rendered him vulnerable to critics in Washington. Congress was conscious of the burden to the American taxpayer of sustaining the occupation, the Japanese people making little contribution themselves. The development of the cold war in Europe cast a deepening shadow over Asia and policy-makers in the State Department and in the Pentagon contemplated the process of strengthening Japan so that it could be a firm bastion in Western defences in East Asia against the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup>

British ministers and officials respected MacArthur and came to view him more favourably as time passed. In 1945 he was regarded with reservations because of the way in which he directed the South-West Pacific Command, with the emphasis fully on American control: it was feared that he might prove critical of Britain. In reality MacArthur acted reasonably in the main. Some of his statements or actions were not seen as ideal, but MacArthur's hard work and commitment were appreciated in the British liaison mission in Tokyo and in London. Sir Alvary Gascoigne, who headed the mission from 1946-51, met MacArthur often and established good relations with him down to the outbreak of the Korean War. Naturally, Gascoigne had to adjust to listening to the idiosyncratic general's interminable statements and self-justifications but, despite occasional disputes, Gascoigne appeared to enjoy his encounters with MacArthur.

At the Foreign Office F.S. Tomlinson and Esler Denning commented favourably on MacArthur at the beginning of 1948 and could not see a viable alternative to him as SCAP.<sup>21</sup> The British agreed that the Japanese economy must be revived but there was anxiety regarding the consequences. Clearly the existing situation was untenable, since the economy was bumping along at a low level and the standard of living was patently inadequate. The Foreign Office held, in March 1948, that living standards should be restored approximately to the levels obtaining in 1930-34. Reparations should be demanded and should embrace industrial assets, shipping, gold deposits and other assets.<sup>22</sup>

Considerable reservations existed concerning textiles, shipping and the Staffordshire potteries; it was anticipated that Japanese competition could assume dangerous proportions.<sup>23</sup> This was a reminder of the ferocity of such competition during the 1930s. Anxiety was accentuated because of the Labour government's commitment to maintaining a full employment economy and through representations from the Lancashire textile industry.

A trade agreement concluded with SCAP approval between the Japanese government and members of the British Commonwealth in November 1948 envisaged a substantial, threefold increase in trade between Japan and the sterling group. This agreement was for one year, to extend from July 1949, and would cover exports from Japan ranging from textiles, industrial machinery, raw silk, caustic soda, chemicals and paper to bunker coal. Imports into Japan from the sterling area would include raw materials such as wool, iron ore, salt, cotton, rubber, tin, jute and manganese.<sup>24</sup>

The British were in agreement with MacArthur that a peace treaty should be concluded sooner rather than later. A prolonged occupation would breed growing resentment in Japan and would render it more difficult to bring the occupation to a satisfactory conclusion. Labour Cabinet ministers did not devote much time to discussing Japan, except in 1951 when the terms of a peace treaty did occupy considerable time. Ernest Benin showed some interest in the process of democratization but his interest was concentrated largely in Europe, although his attendance at the Columbo conference in January 1950 revealed his understanding of issues concerning poverty and development in Asia.<sup>25</sup> Herbert Morrison was compelled to spend a good deal of time discussing Japan in the context of a peace treaty, but he had no real interest in Japan. When it did discuss Japan, the Labour Cabinet showed little sympathy for Japan and was less liberal in approach than MacArthur, John Foster Dulles and the Truman administration.

Officials in the Foreign Office and members of the liaison mission in Tokyo were consistently doubtful as to the durability of democratization. Gascoigne, Denning, Tomlinson and their colleagues anticipated a growing trend towards conservatism. At the end of 1948 Gascoigne summarized Japanese aims as wanting an early end to the occupation; to gain economic assistance from the USA; to re-establish armed forces, using the onset of the cold war and the advance of communism in China as the justification; to expand Japanese trade; and to secure access to regions where Japan's surplus population could emigrate. Gascoigne dismissed the effect of democracy on the Japanese mind as "almost nil".<sup>26</sup> He conveyed his feelings more diplomatically to MacArthur. The general agreed that exaggerated claims for what had been accomplished should not be made, but he took an optimistic view.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1950, just before the outbreak of the Korean War, Gascoigne observed that a more truculent attitude could be discerned in Japan. The occupation had lasted nearly five years and there was no sign that it would terminate soon. Japanese officials were showing exasperation as Washington permitted drift to continue.<sup>28</sup> However, the mood was changing in Washington with the appointment of Dulles to negotiate a peace treaty. Dulles was ambitious and clear in his objectives: he was determined to secure a treaty in 1951 and the war in Korea increased the importance of his endeavours. He was adamant that a treaty must be magnanimous. Having

been present at the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Dulles had no desire to preside over a treaty which would stimulate Japanese ire.<sup>29</sup> Japan would have to forfeit its colonies in accordance with allied policy as announced during the Pacific war, and this would be an onerous punishment. He opposed inclusion of a war guilt clause, as favoured by the Attlee Cabinet; he believed that limitations should not be imposed on the Japanese economy. Dulles was determined to achieve a defence agreement allowing continued establishment of American bases on Japanese soil. It was imperative to conclude defence agreements with Australia and New Zealand, so as to allay their fears regarding possible Japanese revival. MacArthur was jealous of Dulles's role, for he regarded Dulles as ignorant of Asia and in his mind there was room for only one prominent expert on Asia in the Republican Party. However, MacArthur endorsed Dulles's approach in seeking a liberal treaty and continued to do so after his dismissal by Truman.

British officials favoured a liberal treaty, if one not quite as generous as their American colleagues wanted; they saw it as inevitable, given the strength of the American preference, but they were much less sanguine about the aftermath.<sup>30</sup> Dulles was critical of the British approach and feared, at times, that Britain might be prepared to follow an independent policy, as in the recognition of China. Basically Dulles held that the Japanese could be relied on in the future, provided that his line was adhered to, but the British were doubtful.

British reservations were made plain when Dulles visited London in June 1951 for the concluding round of negotiations. Hugh Gaitskell, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, although strongly pro-American, emphasized the presence of vociferous anti-Japanese opinion in Britain, stimulated by the shocking atrocities committed by the Japanese forces during the war. Gaitskell deplored Dulles's wish for Japan to retain gold deposits and thought it would be better for the Americans to keep the gold rather than return it to Japan.<sup>31</sup> Sir Hartley Shawcross, President of the Board of Trade, pressed for assistance to the textile industry; limited help could be attained through terminating Japanese rights under the Congo Basin treaties.<sup>32</sup> Dulles was dismissive initially but later conceded the point, the only real concession (albeit a limited one) that he made to the British. Herbert Morrison told Dulles that the proposed treaty allowed excessive room for Japanese rearmament, and he spoke of the impact on public opinion of past atrocities.<sup>33</sup> Morrison also emphasized anxiety over shipping capacity.<sup>34</sup>

Dulles reiterated that political realities meant that he had to secure a treaty acceptable to the required majority in the American Senate so as to obtain ratification. This was a real problem, although he exaggerated it for his own purposes. Dulles succeeded. The final treaty reflected American rather than British wishes, was approved at the San Francisco conference in September 1951, and was ratified by the Senate in March 1952 with a small number of reactionary Republicans voting against.

Sir Esler Dening, shortly to be Britain's first post-war ambassador to Japan, reflected the cynicism common among British officials: Japanese nationalism would become a problem once more when the memory of the occupation receded. The likelihood of this happening was increased by the American decision to encourage Japanese rearmament, in direct contrast to the policy followed until 1950. As Dening expressed it, there had been a "change in the American attitude, from an almost missionary and visionary zeal to make Japan into a completely pacifist state, to an equally missionary zeal to encourage her rearmament".<sup>35</sup> However, where a possible threat from assertive Japanese nationalism was concerned, MacArthur and Dulles were far more accurate than Gascoigne and Dening. This may have been in part because Japanese economic success was to be far greater than anything deemed feasible in 1951-52.

Before the summer of 1950 Britain showed scant concern with Korea. There were few economic attractions in the peninsula and Korea was divided into American and Soviet spheres of interest. British officials viewed the tergiversations in American policy with even greater cynicism than that displayed in their approach to American endeavours in China. American policy was regarded as muddled and inept; the outcome was likely to be Korea assimilated to communism.<sup>36</sup> Korean nationalism was perceived as passionate, released by the defeat of Japan from the sufferings imposed by a colonial power. Communism was believed to have been more successful than conservative forces in harnessing nationalism. It was difficult to assess the precise situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) after its establishment in 1948. Kim Il-sung was a mysterious figure and was held to be loyal to the Soviet Union, in the manner of the satellite regimes established in Eastern Europe after 1945.

The War Office informed the Foreign Office in December 1949:

In the past it had always been our view that irrespective of strengths the North Korean forces would have little difficulty in dealing effectively with the forces of South Korea should full scale hostilities break out... On the question of aggression by the North there can be no doubt whatever that their ultimate object is to overrun the South; and I think in the long term there is no doubt that they will do so.<sup>37</sup>

While the US had set up a relatively large military mission in the Republic of Korea (ROK) after it secured independence, there was no American guarantee protecting the ROK against aggression. Thus the War Office drew the conclusion that after a lengthy period of border incidents along the 38th parallel the ROK would be weakened from within, as had been the experience of Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia, and then it would succumb as the DPRK assimilated the ROK amidst futile American lamentation. Britain appreciated the military strength and commitment of the DPRK, but Soviet control was exaggerated. Little was known of Kim Il-sung and he was underestimated.

The Foreign Office was not impressed with the structure or economy of the ROK. While Right-wing conservative nationalism was a genuine force, it lacked strength and was discredited by the extent to which conservative nationalists collaborated with the Japanese. Syngman Rhee was free of the taint of collaboration but was seen as too old, autocratic and reactionary to offer the likelihood of establishing a credible regime. Rhee operated through corruption and brutality and his regime bore more than a passing resemblance to another failed administration, that of Chiang Kai-shek. It was fitting that Chiang and Rhee should discover the merits of each other's regimes in public statements and covert contacts in 1949 and 1950, another of the interesting sub-themes associated with the origins of the Korean War. Admittedly, Chiang's need was greater than Rhee's.<sup>38</sup> The ROK economy was weak, inflation was looming as a threat in 1949-50 (a further depressing comparison with KMT China), and Rhee relied on American economic and military aid to survive.

The Foreign Office interpreted the American decision to involve the UN in handling Korean issues in 1947-48 as a sign that the Truman administration was searching for a respectable method of extricating itself from Korea, the UN offering a convenient façade behind which a retreat could be executed. Bruce Cumings has emphasized Dean Acheson's interest in Korea from 1947 and argues that Acheson had no intention of allowing Korea to fall to communism.<sup>39</sup> Certainly Acheson, when Assistant Secretary of State in 1947, did manoeuvre to secure an extension of aid to Korea, but American policy was confused and a major question mark hovered over what action the US would take in the event of conflict in Korea. Doubts were not lessened by the ambiguities present in public statements made by Truman and Acheson in January 1950, including Acheson's controversial National Press Club speech.<sup>40</sup>

The start of serious conflict on 25 June 1950 came as a shock to Britain. No indication of impending fighting emanated from the legation in Seoul: the minister, Captain Vyvyan Holt, in appropriate English manner, commented on the weather in his final communication before the DPRK's advance.<sup>41</sup> He was captured, together with MI6 (intelligence) chief George Blake (it is unclear whether Blake was already working for Moscow or whether his conversion resulted from internment).<sup>42</sup> Rhee's regime had engaged in considerable provocation in inspiring incidents along the 38th parallel between 1948 and 1950: Kim Il-sung's regime bore similar responsibility. The hatred between the competing varieties of Korean nationalism was intense. Rhee and Kim each regarded himself as a super-patriot destined to unite the Korean people under his autocratic, intolerant control and was filled with determination to eliminate the other. As in the Balkans before 1914 (and perhaps contemporaneously) the leaders of the opposing states were willing to risk war on the assumption that the great

powers would act to prevent defeat, since the prestige of each of the two sides was at stake during the cold war.

There was no desire in London to intervene, but no choice remained when the US moved vigorously and swiftly pushed condemnation of North Korean aggression through the UN Security Council in the absence of the Soviet Union - the latter was absent ostensibly in protest at the exclusion of communist China. Britain acted, not out of zeal to defend Rhee's ramshackle regime, but out of the need to preserve close relations with the US and maintain the moral authority of the UN.<sup>43</sup> The chiefs of staff were reluctant to commit British troops in Korea but the Attlee Cabinet concluded that there was no alternative.<sup>44</sup>

After the initial shock and the danger of UN forces being expelled from Korea had been averted, attention began to focus on UN objectives, which were ambiguous. Was the UN concerned to restore the *status quo ante* or to unify Korea? MacArthur's bold stroke at Inchon in mid-September 1950 made the subject more urgent. Despite the growing misgivings of the chiefs of staff, the Attlee Cabinet agreed to sponsor a resolution in the UN General Assembly in early October authorizing the advance of UN forces north of the 38th parallel.<sup>45</sup>

Disturbing reports emanated from British representatives and troops and, more embarrassingly, from British journalists, revealing the cruel methods employed by the agents of Rhee's regime to punish those deemed to be of dubious loyalty.<sup>46</sup> The ringing emphasis on democratic values for which the UN intervened in Korea hardly seemed to square with the brutal actions of Rhee's agents. If Korea were unified, should Rhee control the government? MacArthur's warm praise for Rhee following the liberation of Seoul appeared to reveal no doubt in his mind as to the answer, but the British government wanted to see free elections held and wished to prevent Rhee and reactionary nationalists from manipulating the political situation. Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor, Chief of the Air Staff, was scathing in his denunciation of Rhee and MacArthur and wrote that if Korea were unified, it was important that Rhee should not be able to misgovern a united Korea as he had misgoverned the ROK.<sup>47</sup> China's intervention in October and November 1950 made such considerations academic: the UN was back in the familiar dilemma of ensuring that it was not ejected from the peninsula. Britain was tied to Rhee's government for the duration of the war, invidious as this was.

Neither the Attlee government nor its Conservative successor under Churchill relished the position of supporting Rhee, but the demands of the conflict gave no choice. The prolonged armistice talks from July 1951 to July 1953 were regarded as extremely tedious yet the issue of principle concerning the voluntary return of prisoners-of-war was seen by Churchill as paramount. Rhee's blatant attempts to sabotage an armistice in June-July

1953 incensed Churchill, who dictated incandescent minutes excoriating Rhee.<sup>48</sup> In this respect the Prime Minister's feelings were similar to those of President Eisenhower, who contemplated a possible coup to remove the obdurate Rhee unless he modified his behaviour.

The armistice was signed on 27 July 1953. Rhee refused to sign, although he agreed not to obstruct it, in return for a security treaty from the US and the extension of further economic assistance. India played a key part in resolving the intractable issue of the disposal of POWs. Hopes of achieving political settlement proved abortive: the gap between the two Koreas was too large to be bridged, and the US was determined that a settlement must uphold Rhee's regime.<sup>49</sup> The Geneva conference of 1954, intended originally to concentrate on Korea, was hijacked by the more urgent issues of Indo-China.

To conclude, nationalism in East Asia was seen by British ministers and officials as profoundly disturbing. Chinese communism captured nationalism. The hopes that Britain could establish a viable relationship with Mao's regime waned in 1950 and were further undermined after China's entry into the Korean war. Given the extent of American ire at Peking, it would take considerable time for Britain to develop effective diplomatic relations with China. China's wish to encourage trade with the West in 1952-53 offered the possibility of fostering more positive contacts, but these were handicapped by the application of economic sanctions after Chinese intervention in Korea.<sup>50</sup> Japanese nationalism was not an immediate problem but might become one over the next decade, in the eyes of British officials. In Korea the failure to achieve progress towards a solution based on unification meant that two hostile states would oppose each other with the threat - contemporary note - that this might escalate into another war. The combined nationalism-communism of the DPRK was singularly depressing and the conservative nationalism of the ROK offered little prospect of developing into a democratic system based on respect for civil rights.

To summarize very succinctly, it could be said that British ministers and officials were basically correct in their policy towards China, although arguably they erred in timing; they were wrong in their assessment of Japan; and in the main they were right about Korea.

## Notes

1 For discussion of the British role in China in the 19th and 20th centuries in the broader context of Britain's position in East and South-East Asia see Peter Lowe, *Britain in the Far East: A Survey 1819 to the Present*, London, 1981. For developments in the late 1940s and early 1950s see James Tuck-Hong Tang, *Britain's Encounter with Revolutionary China 1949-54*, London, 1992.

2 For discussion of British and American policies towards China during the Pacific war see Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War against Japan 1941-45*, London, 1978.

3 See T.H. White (ed.), *The Stilwell Papers*, New York, 1948.

4 See J.K. Fairbank and A. Feuerwerker (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 13, part 2, Cambridge, 1986.

5 See D.M. Borg and W. Heinrichs (eds.), *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations 1947-1950*, Guildford, 1980, and N.B. Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy 1949-1950*, New York, 1983.

6 Burgess contributed numerous memoranda and minutes to assessments of the evolution of Chinese communism in the later 1940s and these may be found in the relevant China files in FO 371 files for China in the Public Record Office, Kew. Transcripts/translations of Crown Copyright records in the Public Office appear by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationary Office.

7 "Revolutionary forces of the world rally to combat imperialist aggression", October, 1948, enclosed in FO 371/75816/14878.

8 FO to Paris (and other capitals), 5 October 1949, FO 371/75816/14782 and 10 October 1949, FO 371/75816/14878.

9 Memorandum by Acheson 17 November 1949, folder, memorandum of conversations, November 1949, box 64, Acheson papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri, for Acheson's thinking regarding the chances of separating communist China from the Soviet Union, in a paper submitted to Truman.

10 Record of meeting between Bevin and representatives of the China Association, 16 March 1950, FO 371/83344/30.

11 See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, London, 1970, pp. 356-357.

12 *Foreign Relations of the United States* Vol. 8, 1949, p. 642, Kirk to Acheson, 21 December 1949.

13 "Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance between the USSR and the People's Republic of China", 14 February 1950, included in FO 371/83315/88.

14 Analysis of treaty and agreements, Far Eastern Department, 13 March 1950, *ibid.*

15 See Evan Luard, *A History of the United Nations*, Vol. 1, *The Years of Western Domination 1945-1955*, London, 1982, pp. 313-316.

16 Letter from Sir Oliver Franks to Esler Dening, 7 June 1950, FO 371/83320/9.

17 For a discussion of British policy towards Japan after 1945 see R.W. Buckley, *Occupation Diplomacy: Britain, The United States and Japan 1945-1952*, Cambridge, 1982, and Peter Lowe, "The British Liaison Mission and SCAP 1948-1952: Exchanges during the latter part of the occupation", *Japan Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 2, October 1993, pp. 245-256.

18 For comprehensive accounts of MacArthur's work in Japan see D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur* Vol. 3 *Triumph and Disaster 1945-64*, Boston, 1985, and R.D. Finn, *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida and Postwar Japan*, Oxford, 1992.

19 The "Japan Lobby" consisted of a mixture of officials and businessmen critical of MacArthur for carrying reform too far. They wished to see emphasis put on rebuilding the economy and bolstering Japan's defences against the Soviet Union; see H.B.

- Schonberger, *Aftermath of War: Americans and the Remaking of Japan 1945-1952*, London, 1989.
- 20 See G.G. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-50*, London, 1968, pp. 384-394, for a valuable overview of Kennan's contribution as a key planner in the State Department and why he recommended that policies in Japan should be changed, with the reforming impetus being curtailed.
- 21 Minutes by F.S. Tomlinson, 8 January 1948, and Dening, 29 January 1948, FO 371/69885/368.
- 22 FO to Tokyo, 18 March 1948, FO 371/69885/4213.
- 23 See Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War*, London, 1986, pp. 74-76.
- 24 *The Economist*, 1 May 1948, p. 706.
- 25 See Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin Vol. 3 Foreign Secretary 1945-1951*, London, 1983, pp. 743-750.
- 26 Despatch from Gascoigne to Bevin, 18 December 1948, FO 371/76178/7527.
- 27 *ibid.*
- 28 Despatch from Gascoigne to Younger, 12 June 1950, FO 371/93.
- 29 For a detailed discussion of Anglo-American exchanges over a peace treaty, see Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and the Japanese Peace Treaty 1951*, Peter Lowe and Herman Moeshart (eds.), *Western Interactions with Japan: Expansion, the Armed Forces and Readjustment, 1859-1956*, Folkestone, 1990, pp. 91-104.
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 Treasury memorandum by A.J. Phelps, 6 June 1951, FO 371/92557/564A.
- 32 Record of meeting in House of Commons, 8 June 1951, FO 271/92554/516.
- 33 Record of Morrison-Dulles meeting, 4 June 1951, FO 371/92554/498.
- 34 Record of Morrison-Dulles meeting, 6 June 1951, FO 371/92554/515.
- 35 Despatch from Dening to Eden, 28 April 1952, FO 371/99472/4.
- 36 Minute by D.F. MacDermot, February 1948, cited by Lowe, *Origins of Korean War*, p. 46.
- 37 Letter from Major J.R. Ferguson Innes to E.J.F. Scott, 30 December 1949, FO 371/69542/16032.
- 38 Despatch from Stevenson to Bevin, 3 November 1948, enclosing text of press interview given by Chiang Kai-shek, *New York Tribune*, 31 October 1948, FO 371/69542/16032. In the interview Chiang linked the fate of China with that of Korea, each menaced by the machinations of international communism; see Lowe, *Origins of Korean War*, pp. 150-2.
- 39 See Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Vol. 2, The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950*, Princeton, 1990, pp. 45-54.
- 40 Cumings offers a more subtle explanation of Acheson's speech and denies that it gave a "green light" to DPRK action in June 1950: Cumings Vol. 2, pp. 420-435.
- 41 Letter from Holt to Tomlinson, 22 June 1950, FO 371/84077/23.

- 42 For Blake's bland reminiscences see George Blake, *No Other Choice: An Autobiography*, London, 1990.
- 43 FO memorandum, 26 June 1950, drafted for Bevin (then recuperating in hospital), FO 371/84058/62.
- 44 See Cabinet minutes, 27 June 1950, Cab 128/17, CM39(50)4 and CM42(50)3, 4 July 1950.
- 45 For text see *Foreign Relations of the United States Vol.7*, pp. 904-906, resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, 7 October 1950.
- 46 James Cameron sent graphic reports to *Picture Post*, accompanied by equally graphic photographs by Bert Hardy revealing the brutal repression enforced by the ROK authorities. The proprietor of *Picture Post*, Sir Edward Hulton, disapproved of the frankness of Cameron's reports and this led to Cameron's departure from the illustrated weekly. See also minute by Dening, 14 September 1950, FO 371/84101/434.
- 47 See memorandum by Slessor, 14 September 1950, COS(50)152(8), confidential annex, Defe 4/36.
- 48 For example, see minute by Churchill, 2 July 1953, FO 371/105508/626.
- 49 See Peter Lowe, "The settlement of the Korean War", in J.W. Young (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration 1951-1955*, Leicester, 1988, p. 228.
- 50 See Peter Lowe, "Hopes frustrated: The impact of the Korean War upon Britain's relations with communist China 1950-1953", in T.G. Graser and Keith Jeffery (eds.), *Men, Women and War: Papers from the XXth Irish Conference of Historians*, Dublin, 1993, pp. 211-226, especially pp. 219-225.