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Master's Thesis of Ye Eun Jang

Examining the US Withdrawal and Return to
Korea, 1948-1950:
Consistency Within Contradictory
Commitments

1948-50 년 미국의 한국 철수 및 귀환:
모순에 내재된 일관성에 관하여

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**Examining the US Withdrawal and Return to Korea,
1948-1950:
Consistency Within Contradictory Commitments**

지도교수 안 도 경

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Abstract

The United States' strategic behavior regarding the Korean War presents a puzzle. Military planners of the United States kept themselves from making any decisions that included Korea as an important strategic area in their postwar planning. However, when the Korean War broke out with the North Korean invasion on June 25, 1950, the United States instantly deployed military forces and engaged in the war for three years. What explains these contradictory strategic decisions? I propose that consistency can be found within the contradictory behavior of the United States regarding Korea when one considers an evolving ecosystem of commitments. Using historical archives, I found that the US commitments on democracy, peace, and the United Nations have led to an automatic high degree of commitment to Korea that constrained the United States' future activity. The outbreak of the Korean War and the rapid retreat of the South Korean army awakened awareness of this interaction which the US did not recognize before. Moreover, this relationship was not unilateral. The United States lacked experience and history to prove its credibility to international audiences in the post-World War II period. Exhibiting a military commitment to Korea in this context had strengthened the United States' previous commitments by making precedence of peacekeeping. In brief, I explain how an involuntary locking entrapped the United States into costly missions in the Korean War, and this locking strengthened its credibility on peacekeeping pledges within the frame of an evolving ecosystem of commitments.

Keyword : United States, Foreign policy, Korean War, Intervention, Withdrawal
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Chapter 1. Introduction

The foreign policy of the U.S. was in a quandary after World War II. The United States had to be thoroughly armed to prepare for the confrontation with the Soviet Union. However, it had to reduce expenditure on armaments to meet domestic demands. This apparent dilemma forced the U.S. to consider its areas of strategic priority and immediacy. Within the distinctions between central and peripheral interests, Korea represented the latter. Consequently, military planners of the United States kept themselves from making any decisions that included Korea as an important strategic area in their postwar planning. The decision of a full-scale U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea was based on the same consideration. However, when the Korean War broke out with the North Korean invasion on June 25, 1950, the United States deployed air, naval, and ground forces within a few days and engaged in the war for three years. If the United States considered Korea strategically unimportant, why did they instantly return and become deeply involved during the war? Furthermore, why did the U.S. withdraw its troops, which might have prevented the war, if they were to come back and fight?

For decades, social scientists and historians have examined the strategic motivation of nations that engaged in the Korean War. Several previous studies focused on the international context of the Cold War and the domestic political dynamics within Korea. Scholars discussed whether and how the Korean War could be interpreted as an international war or how it could be examined as a civil conflict (Cumings, 1996, 2010; Stueck, 1997; Dik, 2015; Nam, 2015; Park, 2008). Public disclosures of national security documents in the United States and Russia provided references and further flamed the discussion by providing novel evidence. However, little has changed that the debate remained within searching for states that were responsible for the outbreak of war.

Rational states collect obtainable information sets to form a scheme that maximizes their interests and minimizes risks because there is always an innate probability of engaging in a violent crisis. States constantly monitor each other's choices and actions to build a complete contingency

plan. The question regarding the Korean War is whether there was a complete contingency plan. If so, what explains the inconsistency found in the United States' strategic decisions? Avoiding a similar error in strategic judgment requires examining why decisive strategic decisions are made and unexpectedly change. Previous studies have failed to appropriately address the question of the inconsistency of the United States' contingency plans regarding the Korean War.

It is not to say that the United States' behavioral change went wholly unnoticed by scholars. Instead, it is an oversimplification that led to the inconsistency being largely neglected. Most literature on US behavior regarding Korea between 1948–1950 has interpreted the apparent change as a result of simple miscalculation (Stueck, 1997; Wells, 2010; Tucker, 2000). The argument was twofold. The United States either failed to notice that North Korea would undertake a full-scale invasion of South Korea, or it evaluated the South Korean army as competent enough to handle the conflict independently. Indeed, such arguments are backed up by published materials from the Office of the Historian in the United States Department of State. Yet, the miscalculation theory seems hardly convincing, considering there had been contradictory evaluations of the North Korean invasion and the South Korean army's capacity in the same period. More importantly, the top decision makers, including the president and the National Security Council (NSC), were aware of the possibilities of danger and vulnerability when deciding the withdrawal of United States troops. Thus, the documental evidence for the misunderstanding theory can neither represent nor encompass the discussion of 1948–1950.

Another account interprets the United States troop withdrawal and return as a simple adjustment to changes in the political environment (Stueck, 2013). Such an explanation seems intuitive considering the international context where decisions were made within uncertainties. Because only part of the knowledge was available when making strategic choices, embracing new information could change previous decisions. It is also natural to modify plans when circumstances change. However, inconsistency accounts become less persuasive when one embraces the nature of a complete contingency action plan. Unlike those who view an unwanted war as a historical

coincidence or the maximized effect of simple mistakes, security strategists see it as more of a deterrence failure. Security studies on international relations have long discussed how deterrence methods should be planned, chosen, and implemented in all possible scenarios to evade unwanted war (Schelling, 1960; Powell, 1990; Fearon, 1995). A state should theoretically be prepared for every contingency and should at least acknowledge their possibilities. In that context, regarding a critical change in military commitment as a simple contextual adjustment is an oversimplification that requires further explanation.

This paper is based on more than 1,200 documents and texts from the Office of the Historian in the United States Department of State, reports from the NSC and Central Intelligence Agency, library collections from Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, and memoirs of former President Truman, Dean Acheson, and Douglas MacArthur. Using historical archives, I propose that consistency can be found within the contradictory behavior of the United States regarding Korea when one considers an evolving ecosystem of commitments. By making commitments on democracy, peace, and the United Nations (UN), the US has prioritized something that was initially secondary to its interest: Korea. The US had deliberately restrained itself from militarily committing to Korea. However, its commitments to democracy, peace, and the UN have led to an automatic—despite an unwillingly—high degree of commitment to Korea that constrained the United States' future activity. The outbreak of the Korean War and the rapid retreat of the South Korean army was an event that awakened awareness of this commitment. Moreover, this relationship was not unilateral. The United States and the UN lacked experience and history to prove their credibility to international audiences. Exhibiting military commitment to Korea in this context had strengthened the United States' previous commitments by making a precedence of peacekeeping. In other words, the United States tied its hands and experienced sunk costs in terms of its prior commitments to democracy, peace, and the UN by returning to Korea.

In brief, I examine the involuntary locking that entraps a state into costly foreign conflicts, with such locking unintentionally strengthening its credibility within the ecosystem of commitments. This holistic approach can expand the scope of attention from an independent decision to an ecosystem of commitments. Searching for when and how commitments intermingle and adjust to each other, states could avoid unexpectedly recognizing an important commitment amid international crises.

Chapter 2. Miscalculation and Inconsistency

A significant part of recent scholarship on the US behavior regarding Korea between 1948-1950 has interpreted the inconsistency as a result of miscalculation. Stueck (1997), for instance, argued that “miscalculation occurred that led to the outbreak of war in Korea in June 1950,”¹ describing how domestic politics of the US, personalities of the decision-makers, and dragging condescension toward the Chinese played a role in Washington’s miscalculation. Wells (2010) similarly viewed the Korean War as a result of miscalculation,² and Tucker (2000) claimed that “diplomatically, the war is interesting for the miscalculation and ineptitude on both sides that led up to it.”³ Miller and Wich (2020) went even further to suggest that “human conflicts typically are rife with misperception and miscalculation, but the Korean War stands out (along with World War I) in this respect.”⁴ Generally, the emphasis on the miscalculation is put both on the United States and the Soviet Union — and North Korea as their proxy —, but in terms of the US alone, the miscalculation theory consists centrally of two claims. First, the US failed to notice that North Korea would invade South Korea on a full scale.

¹ William Stueck. *The Korean war as International History*. Princeton University Press, 1997. p. 354

² Samuel F. Wells. "The Korean War: Miscalculation and Alliance Transformation." *The Routledge Handbook of Transatlantic Security*. Routledge, 2010. p. 17-31.

³ Spencer C. Tucker. "From the Editor: Why Study the Korean War?." *OAH Magazine of History* 14.3 (2000): p. 3

⁴ Alice Lyman Miller and Richard Wich. *Becoming Asia*. Stanford University Press, 2020. p. 78

Second, although the US inspected the considerable probability of the North Korean invasion, it evaluated the South Korean army as competent enough to handle the conflict independently.

Both claims of the miscalculation theory are well-grounded, backed up by documental evidence from Washington, Far East Command (FEC), and Seoul. Begin with the first claim. On July 25, 1950, - a month after the Korean War - Acheson testified at the hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he did not think the Soviet Union would dare to carry out a military attack because Korea was not the only one of the various candidates for Soviet attack but also the lowest likely place.⁵ He was not alone in being a skeptic of invasion. As cited in several reports in December 1949, Willoughby, the head of the Far East Command's Intelligence, also expressed doubt seeing such a prospect as "not likely"⁶ and Muccio, the ambassador in Korea while residing in Seoul, pointed out that "the threat of North Korean aggression seems, temporarily at least, to have been successfully contained" until the last moment on June 9, 1950.⁷ The optimistic prospect had been made even before 1950, as seen in Muccio's report on January 27, 1949. In his message to the Security of State, Muccio stated that "failure Peoples Army invade South Korea since Soviet troop evacuation has built up belief sudden invasion unlikely in absence considerable scale co-existing disturbance and turmoil South Korea."⁸

The second claim that the United States regarded the Korean army as capable of containing the North Korean forces is similarly based on several pieces of information. The prospect of the fully prepared South Korean army is found on the same report from Muccio to the Secretary of State on January 27, 1949, when he claimed that by June 1949, it is expected that "Korean security forces will be sufficiently organized and trained to cope with internal subversion and any act of aggression from

⁵ Dean Acheson. *The Korean War*. Norton, 1971. p. 19

⁶ FEC Intelligence Summary, December 30, 1949; FEC Intelligence Summary, March 25, 1950.

⁷ John J. Muccio. "Military Aid to Korean Security Forces," *Department State Bulletin*, June 26, 1950. p. 1049.

⁸ 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 1-2749 [Document 196] "The Special Representative in Korea (Muccio) to Secretary of State." *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1949, vol. VII. p. 1094

north.”⁹ Later on, in January 1950, when Ambassador Jessup visited Korea as part of a 3-month fact-finding to the Far East on behalf of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, he left with an even stronger impression that “problems faced that was, to an unusual degree, extensive and balanced.”¹⁰ This impression was primarily based on the succinct description from General Roberts, Chief, and Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), who followed the Ambassador and “went on to paint a generally optimistic picture of the developments of the Korean security forces, especially of the Army.”¹¹ General Roberts, among them, especially highlighted that “the Korean Army had the capability of containing the North Korean forces in being.”¹² The belief lasted until a few days before the outbreak of war. Even on June 13, Foster, the Deputy Administrator of the Economic Cooperation Administration, told the Senate Committee on Appropriations that the South was “ready to confront any challenge by the North Korean military.”¹³

Given now the historical fact that the Korean War outbroke and the South Korean Army quickly retreated, it is clear that certain officials failed to address either or both the possibility of North Korean invasion and the South Korean Army’s vulnerability. This failure in noticing the probability of danger emboldens the miscalculation theory. However, the miscalculation theory, I believe, can hardly be persuasive considering there had been contradictory evaluation on the North Korean invasion and the South Korean Army capacity in the same period, and more importantly, that the top decision-makers were aware of the possibilities of danger and vulnerability. Furthermore, it falls short on capturing how the concept of strategic importance had counted in making the final decision to withdraw from South Korea. That is, it could not be that the content and scope of miscalculation theory to be fully exhaustive to comprehend the US decision regarding Korea between

⁹ Ibid. p. 1094.

¹⁰ 123 Jessup, Philip C. [Document 7] “The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950, vol. VII. p. 112.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 113.

¹² Ibid. p. 113.

¹³ J. Lawton Collins. *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969. p. 42.

1948-1950. There had indeed been a miscalculation. However, the fact that certain officials had miscalculated proves neither the decision-makers miscalculating altogether nor the miscalculation being a dominant factor in deciding withdrawal.

The recognition of the contradictory statements involved in the decision-making process highlights an important point. The problem of the miscalculation theory arises because in the context of the decision to withdraw, the reports that support the first and second claim — although meaningful and influential — cannot be representative of all the arguments. For example, on February 28, just before the withdrawal of the US troops in June, the US Central Intelligence Agency reported that “withdrawal of US forces from Korea in the spring 1949 would probably in time followed by an invasion,” by the “North Korean People’s Army possibly assisted by small battle-trained units from Communist Manchuria.”¹⁴ This view was shared by the Far East Command in Tokyo and the Korean Military Advisory Group in Seoul. By the end of 1949, “talk of North Korean invasion was almost routine in intelligence circles” in Far East Command. Sawyer (1962) also mentioned that “the North Korean eventually intended to attack southward was doubted by few South Koreans or KMAC advisors,” adding “the *signs* and portents were clear.”¹⁵ The evaluation of the capacity of South Korean Army had been contradictory as well. MacArthur was clearly one of the early pessimist who felt that “the United States did not have the capability to train and equip Korean troops where the Koreans would be able to cope with a full-scale invasion accompanied by international disturbances fomented by the Communists.”¹⁶ Ambassador Muccio, while insisting North Korean threat would be temporary, nevertheless pointed that “the undeniable matériel superiority of the north Korean forces would provide north Korea with the margin of victory in the event of a full-scale invasion of the

¹⁴ CIA, “Consequences of US Troop Withdrawal from Korea in Spring, 1949,” February 28, 1949, RG 263, Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, Estimates of the Office of Research Evolution, 1946-1950, box 3, NA

¹⁵ Robert K. Sawyer, *Military advisors in Korea: KMAC in Peace and War*. Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1962. p. 112.

¹⁶ 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 1-2549 [Document 194] The Secretary of the Army (Royall) to the Secretary of State

Republic.”¹⁷ General Roberts’ diagnosis of South Korean troops’ superiority had flipped from time to time.

What further diminishes the persuasiveness of the miscalculation theory is the fact that the National Security Council, which collected, evaluated, and reported information to the president, had been aware of the possibility of a North Korean invasion. What the top decision-maker did and did not know requires special attention since “it is obvious that the final decisions on the allocation of forces and matériel cannot be left to an area commander and must be made by the top-level command.”¹⁸ In May 1949, NSC reported to the president that “the possibility is recognized that the withdrawal of U.S. occupation forces from Korea at this time, even with the compensatory measures provided herein, might be followed by a major effort on the part of the Soviet-dominated north Korean regime to overthrow the Republic of Korea through direct military aggression or inspired insurrection.”¹⁹ Truman, the top-level command who made the final decisions on the allocation of material and forces, “gave approval” of the South Korean policy based on the Council’s advice. He knew that “the North Koreans were capable of such attack at any time” and “Rhee’s government would be in grave danger if the military units of North Korea were to start a full-scale attack” when he was making decisions on Korea²⁰. Simply claiming the decision of US Troops withdrawal as a result of a miscalculation — the miscalculation of either or both the possibility of North Korean invasion and the South Korean Army’s vulnerability — is to disregard how all the statements mentioned above mattered in the context of 1948-1950.

¹⁷ John J. Muccio, “Military Aid to Korean Security Forces,” *Department State Bulletin*, June 26, 1950, p. 1049.

¹⁸ Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs: Years of trial and hope*. New American Library (published as a Signet Book), 1956. p. 377.

¹⁹ NSC 8/2

²⁰ Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs: Years of trial and hope*. New American Library (published as a Signet Book), 1956. p. 374-375.

Another problem with miscalculation theory is that it fails to reliably capture the weight of the *strategic importance* in diplomatic and military decision-making. True, in some sense, there had been a miscalculation on the intention of adversaries and allies' capability. Not only the Secretary of State, the minister of the Department of Defense, the Economic Cooperation Administration, KMAC, and the Embassy in Korea but also the National Security Council and Truman can also be accused of failing to predict the exact time and scale of the North Korean invasion. However, to argue that miscalculation is the reason for US withdrawal is to hastily assume that miscalculation is a dominant factor in deciding the withdrawal from Korea. To put it another way, claiming there had been miscalculations does not automatically make miscalculations into a decisive factor. What is largely underrated from the miscalculation theory is the strategic importance of Korea. Despite that there had been multiple comments on the "little strategic interest"²¹ of Korea in the period of 1947-1950, even as to be mentioned in National Security Council documents and Foreign Relations of the United States reports several times as a foundation for the military decision regarding Korea,²² miscalculation theory focuses narrowly on intentions and capabilities, often neglecting how the strategic evaluation had mattered. If the headquarters — amid the disorganized contradictory assessments — recognized the considerable probability of North Korean invasion and South Korean troops' unpreparedness but still decided the withdrawal due to the little strategic importance, what explains the instant return of the US Troops to the peninsula when the Korean War had outbroken? Only after we depart from miscalculation theory claiming that the US decision on Korea is a mere consequence of miscalculation can we move on to this next question.

It is not mere behavioral change we are questioning. The puzzle, instead, is the disparity in the degree of commitment. Why did the United States, despite consistent efforts to restrain itself from "overcommitment" to a course in Korea, suddenly change its path to join the fray in Korea after June

²¹ SWNCC 360/1, Enclosure "B" Subject: Policies, Procedures and Costs of Assistance by Countries. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1947, Vol. I. p. 8.

²² *Foreign Relations*. 1947. p. 8. *Foreign Relations*. 1948, vol. VI. p. 1163. NSC 8/2. 1949.

25?²³ There has been considerable attention on miscalculations regarding the outbreak of the Korean War. However, few have questioned the problem of disparity in terms of commitment. One apparent reason for this indifference is its intuitiveness. Inconsistency account, which interprets the US Troop withdrawal and return as a simple inconsistency, fits naturally with the international context in which the military decisions were made within substantial error and confusion. In a realm where too many agents have too much relevance, uncertainty is hardly inevitable. Inconsistency account seems to reflect a widespread recognition that decisions can seldom be done in full knowledge and can be changed at any time according to the situation, context, and necessity at that time accordingly. Such explanation provides an intuitive argument for why foreign policies could be highly caprice.

Inconsistency account becomes less persuasive when one embraces the nature of a complete contingency action plan. Unlike those who embrace an unwanted war as a historical coincidence or the maximized effect of simple mistakes, it is more of a deterrence failure to security strategists. It is neither that there should be a clear-cut illustration on cause and effect nor they can predict in individual conditions whether states will go to war, as Garatzke (1999) refers to “war” as “typically the consequences of variables that are unobservable ex ante.”²⁴ However, he stresses that “the realization that uncertainty is necessary theoretically to motivate war is much different from recognizing that the empirical world contains a stochastic element.”²⁵ After acknowledging the inevitable uncertainty of the empirical world, the probabilities of each scenario should be well taken. Consequently, scholarship of security studies on international relations has long discussed how deterrence mechanisms could be planned, chosen, and implemented in every possible scenario to minimize the risk of unwanted war (Schelling 1966; Powell 1987; Fearon 1994). A state should theoretically be prepared for all situations, and it should at least be aware of the possibility if not

²³ William Stueck. *Rethinking the Korean War*. Princeton University Press, 2013. p. 235.

²⁴ Erik Gartzke. "War is in the Error Term." *International Organization* 53.3 (1999): p. 567.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 567.

prepared perfectly. In that context, defining a critical change in military commitment as a simple adaptation or contextual adjustment is an oversimplification requiring further explanation.

So far, miscalculation theory and inconsistency account both fails to be fully exhaustive to understand the US decision regarding Korea, especially the disparity between the degree of the commitment before and after the outbreak of the Korean War. In the next section, I explore an alternative, and I think more satisfactory, account.

Chapter 3. The Ecosystem of Commitments

For the investment of the United States 'commitment and its observational change towards Korea, it is necessary to start with how the commitment and its credibility have been a critical concept in security studies. Governments in international politics often make commitments to persuade an audience that it intends to perform specific actions. However, a commitment is not unquestionably believed since the audience is unsure whether the government may renege in the future. Because a commitment made by a government can be retracted in the absence of either additional internal or external enforcement mechanisms, skepticism prevails under uncertainties. Facing such plight, methods to increase the credibility of a commitment have been one of the primary concerns of theorists. Fearon (1994, 1997) insists that the possibility of the leaders becoming gripped in their position and not being able to back off due to costs of renegeing could increase the credibility of a commitment in an international conflict. Forder (2001) assumes that reputation and commitment devices are the two main factors that determine the degree of perceived credibility, and Kydland and Prescott (1977), Spiller (1996), and Vreeland (2003) propose institutional arrangements to be commitment devices, for it makes abandonment of an agreement costly for a country. A common

analysis is that a commitment is credible if the “observable gain from deviation from it is below the observable gain from compliance.”²⁶

The credibility of commitment bear significance in war deterrence because the adversaries must believe that a country is willing to make that irrational choice if they cross the line. The fundamental feature of a military commitment that differentiates it from other kinds of international relationships is that “it implies that the decision-makers of an actor nation have an explicit interest in the security of another nation and that this interest could lead to the use of force in support of maintaining the target nation’s security.”²⁷ In other words, a deterrence policy aims to convince an enemy that the costs of using military force to attain foreign policy will outweigh the gains through the threat of military retaliation (Huth 1988). Military commitment, in that sense, is a key factor to the achievement of war-deference politics as they act as warnings and signals of national interest (Schelling 1966; Morgenthau 1973). Although military commitment can hardly be considered as an absolute assurance that one country will militarily defend another (Holsti 1970; Tillema 1973), heightening the credibility is nevertheless important since “deterrence is only possible when the enemy believes in the commitment.”²⁸

A problem arises when a state makes multiple commitments as deterrence, and some seem to go against each other. For example, one state (“defender”) might make a threat to use force against another hostile state (“potential attacker”) when the potential attacker uses military force against an ally (“protégé”) of the defender. The defender’s threat of retaliation as an attempt to prevent a war or invasion, in this case, may regard the potential attacker as an adversary. However, the defender might make another commitment of using economic sanctions against another state, which attempts to build

²⁶ Brunner, Steffen, Christian Flachsland, and Robert Marschinski. "Credible commitment in carbon policy." *Climate Policy* 12.2 (2012): pp. 256-257.

²⁷ Wayne R Martin. "The measurement of international military commitments for crisis early warning." *International Studies Quarterly* 21.1 (1977): p. 154.

²⁸ Gary Miller. "Above politics: Credible commitment and efficiency in the design of public agencies." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 10.2 (2000): p. 299.

an unauthorized nuclear weapon (“potential nuclear power”). Because all countries must be cooperative in order for economic sanctions to work, the defender might also ask for cooperation from the potential attacker of its ally, who is regarded as an adversary. Thus, the boundary between friends and foes becomes blurry since the potential attacker can be a threat against protégé and support against a potential nuclear power at the same time. A state’s commitment to one international institution in a similar vein may or may not be connected with its commitment to other types of institutions. If expectations and requests of various international institutions are contrary, a state’s commitment to one institution may influence its commitments to other institutions (Jeong 1990). Recalling that credibility is evaluated on whether observable gain from deviation from a commitment is below the observable gain from compliance, it is hard to evaluate the credibility of a *single* military and deterrence commitment when costs and benefits of each commitments are often interweaved.

Behaviors can often seem inconsistent when considering a single aim. For instance, when the defender in the example above provides economic aid and increases investment to the potential attacker, the potential attacker might leverage the increased economic power to develop weapons or purchase arsenal technology from other states. This increased military strength of the potential attacker can threaten the protégé, requiring the defender for more substantial effort for the deterrence. The situation might seem inconsistent with the commitment to deter the potential attacker from protégé. However, the measure might be appropriate and even necessary when we turn our attention to the relationship between the defender and the potential nuclear power. It may be that the potential attacker has been relying on the natural resources of the potential nuclear power. So in order to isolate a potential nuclear state and deprive it of its leverage as a vital resource exporter, the defender has to convince other states to trade the valuable resources from other exporters for the economic sanction to be effective. Providing economic aid and increasing investment could be one of such measures, especially to the states which can hardly afford such change on their own. Therefore, subsidizing the potential attacker might be risky in defending the protégé but might be needed for the economic sanction against potential nuclear power to be successful. This example deals with only two aims —

or commitments to put in another way — but in reality, more is involved. The more a state makes multiple commitments, the higher the chance that inconsistent behavior arises.

A comprehensive analysis is therefore essential to understand the behavior that seems contradictory. Above all things, states not only desire to minimize uncertainty and insecurity but also “desire to avoid the expected costs of breaking commitments made to others as part of past practices,”²⁹ as Wendt (1992) famously insists. This is because states establish their reputations through past actions, and other states use such actions as an indicator to estimate future actions (Clare & Danilovic 2012). Other states look to see whether a promise is being upheld and modify their past plans and actions depending on such commitments, and because the behaviors of the states are spatially and temporally interdependent, state action in one crisis could serve as an indicator of future behavior in other crises (Schelling 1960). However, *ex post* repetition cost for noncompliance is not all that matters. As Von Stein (2005) argues, leaders also engage in compliant behaviors because “the *ex ante* costs” of committing is “high enough to deter non-compliant types of signing.”³⁰ The fact that breaking a commitment is both *ex ante* and *ex post* costly to states further explains why the commitments must be viewed in relationships. Because reneging has such a high cost, states have higher incentives to readjust their commitments and behaviors to meet the ends of others instead of completely breaking one. Indeed, extensive and rapid changes being costly, a smooth adjustment is sought (Cyert & Degroot 1974). If so, inconsistency may result — or at least a transitional phenomenon — of a state constantly modifying its behavior to meet not singular but multiple commitments simultaneously. It is necessary, therefore, to examine commitments in relationship with other commitments rather than in singularity.

²⁹ Alexander Wendt. "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics." *International organization* 46.2 (1992): p. 411.

³⁰ Jana Von Stein. "Do treaties constrain or screen? Selection bias and treaty compliance." *American Political Science Review* 99.4 (2005): p. 621.

Not only behaviors derived from commitments but also commitments themselves continually adjust to each other. Although revoking a commitment at once is more complicated and costly, strengthening or weakening a commitment in relationships with other commitments is possible and sometimes necessary when looking at the entire commitment system. This is most importantly due to the fact that “coherence between individual commitments and broader principles,” along with “precision of individual commitment,” is recognized to help limit opportunistic behavior³¹. As commitments are strengthened when tied to a broader system, states make an effort to seek coherence between individual commitments and comprehensive structure (Kenneth and Snidal 2000). However, it is constellations of commitments themselves that interact and formulate a broader context. As Stein (1982) claims as “structural arguments should be recognized as constituting the determinants of those different patterns of interest that underlie the regimes themselves,” and that “the different constellations of preferences thus exist in different areas and create different incentives and prospects for international regimes,” amidst the structure, a single commitment adjusts to the condition and acts as a condition simultaneously.³² This structure and dynamics are what I will call the *evolving ecosystem of commitments*.

In this paper, I propose that the seemingly contradictory behavior of the United States between 1948-1950 can be found consistent within the evolving ecosystem of commitments. By making prior commitments on democracy, peace, and the United Nations as its institutional device, the US has staked something of value, something that was initially secondary to his interest: Korea. Although the US has not deliberately made commitments directly on Korea, its commitments on democracy and peace and the UN have made automatically, despite unwillingly, a high degree of commitment on Korea, thereby constraining future activity. The rapid retreat of the South Korean army awakened

³¹ Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal. "Hard and soft law in international governance." *International organization* 54.3 (2000): p. 427.

³² Arthur Stein. "Coordination and collaboration: regimes in an anarchic world." *International organization* 36.2 (1982): pp. 319-320.

the awareness of this commitment and after recognizing itself staking interest in Korea, the consequences of noninvolvement were so expensive that inconsistency was no longer a possible alternative. The US 'behavioral change, in this sense, should neither be interpreted as a mere misunderstanding nor inconsistency, but an awakening of the awareness of unconscious commitment that an actor has unwillingly made.

This relationship, however, is not one-way only. The credibility of United States' commitments on democracy and peace in general and the United Nations have also been strengthened by exhibiting military commitment on Korea. Being a guardian of democracy and peace while participating in the Korean War in the name of the United Nations, the US has proved to the world how much it was willing to pay for keeping its commitments. In other words, by coming back to Korea, the United States tied its hands and sunk costs in its prior commitments on democracy, peace, and the United Nations, thereby making such commitments credible. In brief, I concern the involuntary *locking* that entraps a state into costly foreign conflicts and such locking *unintentionally* strengthening its reputation within the ecosystem of commitments. This holistic approach expands our scope of attention from a single decision to an ecosystem of commitments, explaining how consistency can be searched upon seemingly contradictory behaviors. In the following section, I will explore the US decision on Korea between 1948-1950, and further illustrate the United States' commitments on democratic order and peace and the United Nations, describing how the commitments interacted and evolved altogether.

Chapter 4. Commitment to Korea

After the end of World War II, Korea split into two as it became independent from Japan. A devoted Communist, Kim Il Sung, was taken to Korea in October 1945 after becoming a member of the Soviet unit when he was set up as the leader of the northern half of the Korean peninsula. The southern part

of Korea, on the other hand, was rebuilt by the leadership of a longtime anti-Communist, Syngman Rhee, under the careful inspection of the United States. As the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established by election on the Southern part of Korea on 15 August 1948, and the Soviets, with Kim Il Sung, installed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 9 September, Korea has formally divided and polarized. After the two polarized divisions had formed, the Soviets pursued mutual withdrawal of American and Soviet forces altogether from Korea in an attempt to avoid additional actions by the UN to impose a settlement. The decision of the United States was different as it decided to aid the South to defend itself against North Korean invasion but not to commit itself to South Korea's defense (Miller and Wich 2020). The classified National Security Council document regarding Korea in April 1948 and its reaffirmation in March 1949 delivers the message on how Washington, above all, regarded Korea as an area with limited strategic importance. Hence, it preferred keeping Korea within the UN's authority rather than directly tying down the American troops on Korea. Based on different considerations, the Soviet forces withdrew by the end of 1948, and the United States followed the withdrawal by June 1949.

But when the Korean War broke out, the United States could not stand behind the United Nations as it intended, leaving everything to the United Nations and minimizing its intervention. The North Korean full-scale invasion began on the twenty-fourth June, Washington time. After declaring that "the attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war,"³³ and ordered US air and naval forces to back the ROK troops. Ground forces were authorized of deployment a few days later as well. Meanwhile, the UN Secretary Council adopted a resolution claiming North Korea as the invader and requiring that the troops be withdrawn above the thirty-eighth parallel on 25 June. However, while it approved a US-sponsored resolution demanding UN

³³ Statement Issued by the President [Washington] June 27, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Korea*, Vol VII

members provide the ROK with all necessary aids to repel the aggressors on 27, the US troops were already deployed and permitted to engage in combat operations even before such measures were taken (Schnabel 1972). Since the Joint Chiefs of Staff called General MacArthur to “remove restrictions against air and naval operations against North Korean military targets below the 38th Parallel” on June 26, the resolution of the UN confirmed actions that were already taken by the US.³⁴

To see why the US moved on from a decision to withdraw as an attempt “not [to] commit itself to the ROK’s defense,”³⁵ or to go “against overcommitment,”³⁶ towards the active military commitment after the outbreak of war, let’s first examine what the US had intentionally committed and not committed on Korea. In their postwar planning to meet Russian aggression, military planners of the United States consistently kept themselves from making any decision that includes or could include Korea as an important strategic area. Immediately after December 12, 1948, when United Nations General Assembly called for the withdrawal of all American forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General MacArthur gradually pulled out the troops from the peninsula. Interestingly, as the Joint Strategic Survey Committee told the Joint Chiefs of Staff in January 1948, they knew that “the withdrawal of US forces will probably result in Communist domination ... by the USSR.”³⁷ Withdrawal, however, was still made despite such expectations. When the body called for the withdrawal of all American forces on December 12, 1948, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the troops in Korea to be reduced from the current 16,000 troops to a single regimental combat team (RCT) of 7,500 men, and all US troops went out of Korea by the end of 1949.³⁸

³⁴ James F. Schnabel. *Policy and Direction: The first year*. Vol. 3. Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1972. pp. 73-74.

³⁵ Alice Miller and Richard Wich. *Becoming Asia*. Stanford University Press, 2020. p. 67.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 69.

³⁷ Rpt, JSSC to JCS, 1483/50, 30 Jan 48. Requote from James F. Schnabel. *Policy and Direction: The first year*. Vol. 3. Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1972. p. 33.

³⁸ James F. Schnabel. *Policy and Direction: The first year*. Vol. 3. Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1972. pp. 60-80.

The document National Security Council to the President on March 22, 1949, reveals that the United States worried the result being interpreted as a betrayal by the US of its friends and allies in the Far East. The consequence of disengagement, therefore, “would constitute a severe blow to the prestige and influence of the UN,” since the South Korean government was established under the aegis of the UN, and “the interest of the US must be regarded as parallel to, if not identical with, those of the UN.”³⁹ Confronting the difficulty, the United States thought of three possible courses of action. First, to disregard Korea to Communist domination. This action, as indicated above, would assault the spirit of every international commitment the US has made and will make while simultaneously damaging American prestige and leadership throughout the Far East irreparably. Second, to unconditionally guarantee the political independence and integrity of South Korea, using the force of arms if necessary. This option that contains the commitment of the United States to continue direct political, economic, and military responsibility in South Korea, embeds the risk of involvement in a major war in the territory where the USSR accrue virtually all of the natural advantages. Third, to establish within practicable and feasible limits, as a middle course, support of the government of ROK “as a means of facilitating the reduction of the US commitment of men and money in Korea while at the same time minimizing to the greatest practicable extent the chances of South Korea’s being brought under Communist domination as a consequence of the withdrawal of US armed forces.”⁴⁰ Considering the assessment of little strategic interest in Korea, the United States embarked upon the middle option.

Still, more decisions had to be made regarding what specific measures the United States should implement for the middle option. Between 1948-1950, the United States and Korea had

³⁹ NSC 8/2 [Document 209] Report by the National Security Council to the President: POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH RESPECT TO KOREA, FRUS

⁴⁰ Ibid.

discussed four methods that could minimize the full-scale North Korean invasion and strengthen the ROK troops:

1. The formation of the Pacific Pact similar to the Atlantic Pact
2. A mutual defense agreement
3. Open verbal commitment on Korea
4. Economic support
5. Military support

Although some were an issue of a binary choice between approval and dismissal, most options were more of a matter of degree that required adjustments to suit the frequent changes in the international and domestic — both Korean and the United States — situation. To fully understand the problem, it is necessary to explain all the changes that appeared in each process, but, unfortunately, this paper did not include all the details. Because this study focuses on identifying what the US intended in terms of the commitment while seeking through its foreign policy direction, the scope is limited in terms of tracking the subtle changes that went through of all four courses. However, the contents of this article are sufficient to show what the United States considered in making each choice on Korea. With this in mind, let's look at each of the four methods.

4.1. The formation of the Pacific Pact

Demands for military security pacts have already been continuous in other East Asian regions apart from Korea. Marshall Green in the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, on a paper on July 29, 1949, insisted that Koumintang seeks for alliance with the United States, adding if the United States pursue long-term responsibility for the security of the Western Pacific by Pacific Pact or some other security agreement, it is “not impossible that the softening process now apparent world ... in a willingness to

follow the U.S. in a conference without the USSR,”⁴¹ while dealing with the issue of Kuomintang China. A few months later, on November 18, Butterworth, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, noted to the Secretary of State that Australia seeks a security guarantee as well. However, unlike Marshall who supported the the need for such security pact, Butterworth was concerned that such a request would attract other Asian countries, including the Philippines and Korea, resuscitating discussion of the Pacific Pact. He added clear reasons against committing on a general security guarantee through Pacific Pact or a similar measure. For one, the US “cannot give extensive additional military commitments without seriously diluting the effectiveness of those already given.”⁴² Second, “such commitments moreover reduce the flexibility” of the US foreign policy, and third, the “US guarantee would also be likely to retard assumption of reasonable defense responsibilities by Australia and other states in a position to contribute substantially.”⁴³ The final position and decision of the Secretary of State turned out to be same with the Assistant Secretary of State. The Secretary of State Acheson made several statements at a press conference on May 18, 1949, that “Pacific defense pact could not take shape until present internal conflicts in Asia were resolved.”⁴⁴

Therefore, it is no surprise that the US dismissed Korea’s request for such a security pact to be formed under the guidance of the US. Even after the dismissal by the Secretary of State Acheson by a press conference in May, there had been several additional requests from Korea upon the United States ‘underwriting a Pacific Pact. On July 11, 1949, the Special Representative of the President of Korea, Dr. Chough, again inquired Acheson about the possibility. However, Acheson replied that “my view on this subject had been set forth on more than one occasion during recent conferences,”

⁴¹ 740.0011 PW (Peace) / 7-2949. [Document 124] “Views of Other Countries Toward a Japanese Peace Settlement”. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1949, Vol. VII. p. 716.

⁴² 847.20 / 11-1849. [Document 164] “Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Butterworth) to the Secretary of State.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1949. Vol. VII. p. 924.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 924.

⁴⁴ [Document 324] “Editorial Note.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1949. Vol. VII. p. 1683.

and that “the United States did not as this time contemplate any further extension of the undertaking embodied in the North Atlantic Pact.”⁴⁵

This position continued afterward, as shown in the report on January 1950. While the visit of Ambassador Jessup on behalf of Secretary of State Acheson, President Rhee spoke his desire that Pacific Pact should be concluded, and that he felt “Australia and New Zealand would be interested, but that the leadership must be taken by the United States.” In the same visit, the President once more requested the Pacific Pact “with definite features of military alliance,” and stated “that the Government of Korea does not believe that such a program can be expected to succeed without early American participation.”⁴⁶ However, Jessup dismissed the request by reminding him that “all successful regional arrangements such as those in the Americas, in Western Europe and in the North Atlantic community developed in response to a local regional sense of solidarity,” that “this could not be imposed from outside.”⁴⁷

4.2. A Mutual Defense Agreement

The proposal of a mutual defense agreement was first raised by President Rhee. Although he did not specify what details should be included in such an agreement, his desire for such an agreement appears several times in policy documents. Notably, one of the earliest requests was made through the local press. President Rhee’s interview on the urge for a mutual defense agreement unquestionably inspired the local press *Ryun Hab Shinmun* as it play-backed Rhee’s emphasis of urgency in making a defense pact against Communist overwhelming. The *Ryun Hab Shinmun*, considered having close

⁴⁵ 895.24 / 7-1149 [Document 268] “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1949, Vol. VII. pp. 1417-1418.

⁴⁶ 611.95 / 1-1450 [Document 1] “Memorandum by the Ambassador at Large, Philip C. Jessup.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VI. p. 61.

[Document 7] “The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950. Vol. VI. p. 115.

⁴⁷ 611.95 / 1-1450 [Document 1] “Memorandum by the Ambassador at Large, Philip C. Jessup.” *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VI. p. 62.

ties to the presidential family, even went so far as to state that “according to a certain source ... defense agreement will now progress very rapidly and signing expected in Washington middle of this month.”⁴⁸

The press release in Korea disturbed the United States since it did not want the South Korean public opinion to endorse such a proposal and strengthen the request. Because the US had domestic and international audiences who were eyeing its strategic behavior on small nations that suffered from the danger posed by Communist neighbors, the US could not simply dismiss the request of a mutual defense agreement publicly for the action could negatively signal the US disregarding the need for support. Being pressured by the press release, Muccio contacted President Rhee and delivered a message that “[He] also took occasion state US had never entered into mutual defense pact with any single nation,” adding “constant public reference here was embarrassing and would be productive of no favourable result.”⁴⁹ President Rhee, confronting the cynical reply, had expressed displeasure “with the lack of progress toward negotiations for a mutual defense agreement between the United States and the Republic of Korea.”⁵⁰

Things had changed after October 1949, when President Truman approved the Mutual Defense Assistance Act (P.L. 329, 81st Congress; Stat. 714). As Congress accepted the recommendation regarding the military assistance program and accepted them in the Mutual Defense Act of 1949, it became law on October 6, 1949.⁵¹ Certain fundamental principles were set forth to lead the operation and progression of the mutual defense assistance: (1) Because economic recovery is vital for security, full efforts should be given to balancing national financial strength against

⁴⁸ Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State. *The Far East and Australasia* (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Volume VII, Part 2). 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 5-649: Telegram [Document 235] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, May 6, 1949.

⁴⁹ 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 5-949: Telegram [Document 238] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State. May 9, 1949. p.1279.

⁵⁰ 895.00/5-749.

⁵¹ Robert Connery and Paul T. David. "The mutual defense assistance program." *American Political Science Review* 45.2 (1951): p. 326.

military strength. (2) Nations are expected to put a comparatively large portion of their national budget into military expenditures. (3) Finally, the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) should function so that the impression of self-security and confidence might increase among the free world's peoples.⁵² Relying on such a basic principle, section 302 authorized the total expenditure of \$ 27,640,000 to provide military assistance to the Philippines, Korea, and Iran, and the total sum of the allotment for Korea amounted to \$ 10,970,000.⁵³ The Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between Korea and the US, requested by section 401 of P.L. 329, was confirmed in Seoul on January 26, 1950.

The MDAP, however, is more evidence of the United States 'limiting its attention and carefully evading an overcommitment than proof of increased concern on the Korean issue. Indeed, the MDAP was first recommended by the National Security Council after the creation of the Western Union to give consideration to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through developing a program of military assistance.⁵⁴ Ever since the five European powers — the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg — signed the Brussel Treaty forming the Western Union on March 17, 1948, the United States exhibited a genuine interest in the Western Union. In the summer of 1948, conversations began in the US, and after nine months, on April 4, 1949, the United States joined the five European powers of the Western Union along with Denmark, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Iceland, and Canada in the North Atlantic Treaty.⁵⁵ MDAP, in this context, was an aid of the United States to implement military plannings prepared by NATO. The intention of the US to enable successful strategic plans of NATO can be seen in the treaty itself. By devoting the whole section of Title I, the United States declares that such an act is to "increase the integrated defensive armed strength of the parties to the treaty, ... to furnish military assistance in the form of

⁵² Ibid. p. 327.

⁵³ ACT, AN. "UNITED STATES MUTUAL DEFENSE ASSISTANCE ACT OF 19491."

⁵⁴ Robert Connery and Paul T. David. "The mutual defense assistance program." *American Political Science Review* 45.2 (1951): p. 325,

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 324.

equipment, materials, and services to such nations as are parties to the treaty.”⁵⁶ This lay in sharp contrast to the section devoted to Korea, named by Title III, *Other Assistance*, simply mentioning that the President is “authorized to furnish military assistance ... [through] any moneys in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated.”⁵⁷ Even compared to China, where a total of \$ 75,000,000 was allocated for assistance considering “the matter of urgency,”⁵⁸ Korea had a comparatively infinitesimal concern. Unfortunately, the Mutual Defense Assistance Program did not act as a signal of increased military commitment on Korea as President Rhee had pursued.

4.3. Open verbal commitment on Korea

The proposition that the United States making an open statement on the protection of Korea faced a rapid dismissal compared to the other options that were on the table. On April 13, 1949, President Rhee asked Muccio for the United States Government to publicly re-affirm the pledge in the amity clause of the Korean-American Treaty in 1882. Such request was based on the consideration that “when such an understanding is sufficiently publicized, the American people will come to know that the United States is committing itself to the extent of helping Korea whenever a predatory or aggressor nation deals unjustly with Korea, and they will know that this is done not only for the security of Korea but also for the security of the United States.”⁵⁹ As in the previous circumstances, the United States was not pleased with this request because it had no intention of deeply intervening in the Korean problem. After receiving the proposal, Muccio contacted the Secretary of State Acheson if any views the Department may have on this matter.⁶⁰ Acheson responded the next day with a message that “Treaty of 1882 were rendered inapplicable by series agreements entered into by Korean Govt

⁵⁶ ACT, AN. "UNITED STATES MUTUAL DEFENSE ASSISTANCE ACT OF 19491."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 1209.

⁶⁰ 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 4-1449: Telegram [Document 219] The Special Representation in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII. pp. 1201-1202.

with Jap Govt during period 1904 to 1910 and that Treaty therefore no longer in effect.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, he tried to soothe President Rhee by adding “inasmuch as many details of Treaty obviously been rendered inapplicable by passage of time and changed circumstances this Govt believes it wld be appropriate consider negotiation new treaty of friendship and commerce.”⁶² President Rhee seemed convinced when Muccio delivered the content but made a similar request a month later. He again asked for a reaffirmation of US adherence to the Treaty of 1882,⁶³ or the US to make “a public declaration ... of a pledge to defend a reunited, democratic, independent Korea, in accordance with the policy of President Truman respecting Communist aggression,”⁶⁴ but this time, Muccio himself answered despite there is “no encouragement re these desiderate ... the US would be willing consider negotiation modern treaty of friendship or commerce.”⁶⁵ As can be seen, what Korea demanded was a reconfirmation of the previous agreement and an open declaration, but the United States expressed its intention to reject the public statement indirectly by conveying only the opinion that it is willing to sign a new agreement.

4.4. Economic Support

Economic support was one of the most crucial factors in the United States' aid to Korea from the beginning. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee report on April 29, 1947, emphasizes “if assistance is given it should, in each instance, be sufficient to positively assist the nation aided to achieve, or

⁶¹ 711.952/4-1549: Telegram [Document 221] The Secretary of State to the American Mission in Korea. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII. p. 1212. And 740.00119 Control (Korea) /5-1749: Telegram [Document 249] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII. p. 1328.

⁶² Ibid. p. 1213.

⁶³ 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 5-1149 [Document 244] Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Butterworth), *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII. p. 1302.

⁶⁴ 740.00119 Control (Korea) / 5-1649: Telegram [Document 247] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII. p. 1311.

⁶⁵ 740.00119 Control (Korea) /5-1749: Telegram [Document 249] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII. p. 1328.

retain, a sound economy, to maintain the armed forces necessary for its continued independence and to be of real assistance to the United States in case of ideological warfare.”⁶⁶ This position continued afterward, as NSC 8 concluded that the US should undertake within practicable and feasible limits to build a program of support, which includes the extension of economic aid along with the training and preparing of native ROK armed forces. It was also part of the policy aims that appeared in NSC 8/2 to “assist the Korean people in establishing a sound economy ... as essential bases of an independent and democratic state.”⁶⁷ Because the main objective of the US foreign policy regarding Korea was to enable Korea to solidify its position as an independent state and to protect itself from external aggression, providing economic aid to help secure the initial fiscal soundness seemed to match the aim. Taking the consideration, the agreement on financial assistance between the US and Korea entered into force on December 10, 1948,⁶⁸ and based on such foundation, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) proposed a program of expenditures on Korea of approximately \$192 million for the fiscal year 1950, and total amounts of \$410 million until July 30, 1952.⁶⁹

The original contemplation of the ECA had not been implemented, but President Truman, sharing the analysis, sent a message to Congress shortly before the termination of the military appropriation in 1949, requesting economic aid to Korea of \$150 million.⁷⁰ Two interim grants gave ECA \$60 million regarding the program until February 15, 1950,⁷¹ but besides the measure, Congress did not reply to Truman’s request until four months passed. On January 19, 1950, legislation authorizing the remainings of \$150 million was defeated in the House of Representatives by a vote of 193 to 191.⁷² However, A Senate Bill, which was amended to reduce the appropriation to \$60

⁶⁶ “United States Assistance to Other Countries From the Standpoint of National Security,” Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. p. 737.

⁶⁷ NSC 8/2

⁶⁸ TIAS 1908, or 62 Stat. (pt.3) 3780.

⁶⁹ NSC 8/2

⁷⁰ Harry Truman. *Memoirs: 1946-1952: Years of Trial and Hope*. Signet Books, 1956. p. 375.

⁷¹ P.L. 343, 81st Congress, October 10, 1949 and P.L. 430, 81st Congress, October 28 1949.

⁷² 895A.00R/1-2050 [Document 3] Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. John Z. Williams of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950, Vol. VII.

million under the Far Eastern Economic Assistance Act of 1950 (64 Stat. 5.), was enacted a month later, on February 14, 1950.⁷³ In addition to the total economic aid to Korea of \$110 million in the fiscal year 1950, the Far Eastern Economic Assistance Act had allowed for the additional budget up to \$30 million to the ECA for Korean aid, “provided that no coalition gov was formed in the ROK which included Communists or members of the ruling party of Korea.”⁷⁴

However, the officials were realistic when they were aware of the fact that “even with U.S. economic assistance there is no assurance that south Korea can be made economically self-sufficient so long as the peninsula remains truncated.”⁷⁵ What further disturbed the United States was a severe inflation that haunted Korea. Continued budget deficiency and worsening economic controls have been consistently pointed out as reasons of intensifying inflation from 1949, but what made matters worse was President Rhee and ROK officials’ behaviors. On February 14, 1950 the US-ECA had pointed:

*“[US-ECA] view great concern and disapprobation [on] (a) apparently unrealistic attitude responsible ROK officials toward inflationary situation and tendency shift blame on ECA or US Govt as exemplified by statement of Min of Food in the Assembly regarding rice situation; (b) official distortion of facts concerning financial situation of ROK as exemplified by memo to Jessup from Pri Min ... and (c) President’s act of by-passing ROK-US Stabilization Comite (expressly established to deal with inflation) on 1 Feb in matter of food distribution Seoul and disregarding ECA advice”*⁷⁶

Such inability and misdemeanor of Korea in coping with inflation sent a negative signal to the United States since the US had repetitively claimed that it only “helped countries which helped

⁷³ P.L. 447, 81st Congress

⁷⁴ 895A.00R/1-2050 [Document 3] Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. John Z. Williams of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950, Vol. VII.

⁷⁵ NSC 8/2

⁷⁶ 895.10/2-1450: Telegram [Document 11] The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950, Vol. VII.

themselves.”⁷⁷ It was in this sense that Ambassador Jessup on his visit to Seoul “urged the Koreans not to “sit back and hope that the United States will cope with the situation alone.””⁷⁸ The United States steadily observed the situation in Korea to investigate whether the “apparent inability or unwillingness [of] ROK [to] recognize and deal effectively with inflation”⁷⁹ would make its efforts to help Korea “increasingly difficult,”⁸⁰ occasionally threatening Korea that it might “consider ...[aiding] lesser sum from the Appropriation Committees than the \$60,000,000 authorized by the Congress” if necessary.⁸¹ The US attention on the inflation of Korea continued until just before the outbreak of war.

4.5. Military Support

The fast demobilization of the US forces after the end of World War II and domestic requests to cut down military expenditures had led to shortages in the workforce of the army and a close investigation of United States commitments overseas. It was in this context that the Department of the Army asked Generals Hodge and MacArthur for their opinions on Korean forces in October 1947.⁸² Hodge suggested a South Korean army of six divisions, well prepared with headquarters and service troops equipped and trained by the United States workforce within a year. However, MacArthur’s proposal was different as he claimed the establishment of Korean defense forces to be delayed until the United Nations General Assembly expressed its opinion considering the formation of a South Korean army to be premature. Four months later, on February 6, 1948, General MacArthur requested the

⁷⁷ 123 Jessup, Philip C. [Document 7] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol.VII.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ 123 Muccio, John J.: Telegram [Document 15] The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol.VII.

⁸⁰ 895B.13/3-1550: Telegram [Document 16] The Deputy Administrator of the Economic Cooperation Administration (Foster) to the Embassy in Korea. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol.VII.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Robert Sawyer. *Military advisors in Korea: KMAC in Peace and War*. Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1962. p. 28.

augmentation of the Constabulary from the current 20,000 to 50,000 men, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized such proposal on March 10, 1948, along with the supply of small arms, canon, and armored vehicles.⁸³ After taking such measures, the Department of the Army ordered General Hodge to build conditions in Korea suitable for the US forces could be withdrawn at the end of 1948, and “the Korean commitment be brought to a close.”⁸⁴ In the same month, on April 2, NSC 8 also reported that the objective of the US in withdrawing troops is to “terminate the military commitment of the U.S. in Korea as soon practicable.”⁸⁵ The United States, as stated in NSC 8, nevertheless envisaged the establishment of a diplomatic program to administer economic and military aid to Korea, with an army group attached to advise if required.

On December 12, 1948, the UN General Assembly finally recommended the withdrawal of the occupation forces from Korea as early as possible. However, despite the original plans of the US officials, the complete withdrawal of US troops was postponed due to the lack of preparation by the Korean military and psychological reasons until May 1949. The fact that the United States deferred their complete withdrawal considering the lack of capability of the Korean army, however, is not that the US departed when ROK troops were thoroughly prepared for invasions. The report from the intelligence organizations below exhibits the United States’ perception of Korea’s security before their final withdrawal:

“Withdrawal of US forces from Korea in the spring 1949 would probably in time be followed by an invasion, timed to coincide with Communist-led South Korean revolts, by the North Korean People’s Army possibly assisted by small battle-trained units from Communist Manchuria. Although it can be presumed that South Korean security forces will eventually develop sufficient strength to resist such an invasion, they will not have achieved that capability by the spring of 1949. It is unlikely that such strength will be achieved before January 1950. Assuming that Korean Communists would make

⁸³ Ibid. p. 29.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 30.

⁸⁵ NSC 8

*aggressive use of the opportunity presented them, US troop withdrawal would probably result in a collapse of the US-supported Republic of Korea, an event which would seriously diminish US prestige and adversely affect US security interests in the Far East. In contrast, continued presence in Korea of a moderate US force, would not only discourage the threatened invasion but would assist in sustaining the will and ability of the Korean themselves to resist any future invasion once they had the military force to do so and, by sustaining the new Republic, maintain US prestige in the Far East.*⁸⁶

The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Navy, and the Air Force

February 24, 1949

The US was even aware that the diplomatic aid programs and military advisory groups remaining after the departure of the US troops were not enough to manage the security danger competently. The same report insisted the presence of the American Mission in Korea (AMIK), including the ECA Mission, Diplomatic Mission, and the Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG) and the United Nations Commission on Korea (UNCOK), would “not prevent the disintegration of the Republic of Korea and eventual Communist domination if the US troops are withdrawn before the Korean security forces are capable of resisting a combination of external and internal attacks.”⁸⁷ Still, the withdrawal was conducted as the United States’ goal was not to make Korea perfectly safe and competent but to minimize the risk of internal and external turmoil by providing support while evading direct military commitment on Korea.

The United States kept its promise when it provided fundings and supplies in terms of arms to strengthen ROK army. KMAC periodically checked what South Korean Army were in need and reported Washington for the required materials. For instance, on January 7, 1950, KMAC recommended the United States to offer logistic supports including (a) crew served weapons,

⁸⁶ “Consequences of US Troop Withdrawal From Korea in Spring, 1949.” ORE 3-49. Published 28 February 1949. Central Intelligence Agency for the President of the United States. National Archives: Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 2.

Engineer items, and additional artillery for existing Ground Forces; (b) training planes and minimum essential equipment that could combat high performance aircraft in North Korea for air force; and (c) US Navy type P. C. Vessels with shore signal installations as ordnance and signal equipment.⁸⁸ KMAG — along with Muccio — especially focused on establishing capable Coast Guard to block communist building up their efforts to smuggle in sea by both men and arms.⁸⁹ Because the road blocks and controls cut North Korean infiltration to a lesser degree, the communists had been aggressive in sea making the Korean coast guard patrol difficult to control. The need for additional support for the Korean Air Force, which has less technology than the North Korean military, had also been continuously raised. However, besides the coast guard and the air force, Korea's overall logistics and infrastructure were scanty. Not only arms and weapons but the Army also lacked basic materials such as cotton, cement, lumber, hides and skins, and rubber. Muccio, in this regard, recommended raising military aids up to 20 million dollars for construction of new hangars and shops for Air Force, 150 million won for gun sheds and maintenance in Army, and 15 million won for fuels, lubricants, paints in coast guard, on December 19, 1950.⁹⁰

This demand was not accepted since it exceeded the existing amount of budget on military assistance allocated to Korea. The United States aided Korea by dissemination of military supplies or the delivery of weapons, but in more cases what was decided on the mainland was budgeting for military support. The most important budgeting for Korea had been allocated by the Mutual Defense Act. The Embassy and KMAG had constantly insisted that the “\$10.23 million allotment was far from adequate to meet the minimum all-around needs of the Korean Security Forces in the light of the situation existing in this part of the world,”⁹¹ but Washington refused to approve additional fund. As

⁸⁸ 795.5/1-2550 [Document 5] The Chief of the United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea (Roberts) to the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio). *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950, Ver. VII.

⁸⁹ 611.95/1-1450 [Document 1] Memorandum by the Ambassador at Large, Philip C. Jessup. Jan14, 1950

⁹⁰ 895.00R/2-1050: Telegram [Document 10] The Chargé in Korea (Drumright) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950, Vol. VII.

⁹¹ 795.5/1-2550 [Document 5] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State. *FRUS*. 1950, Vol. VII.

we have seen earlier in dealing with the economic aid, the United States recognized the need for economic aid in Korea and took practical measures by setting a budget that was considered appropriate, but did not want to support it above the budget set. Therefore, as it was set from the beginning, “total allotments by Minister National Defense to its units first three quarters ending 31 December [fiscal year 1950, were] 19,048 million won. Divided as follows, by quarters: Ministry National Defense, 121 million; Army 16,523 million; Navy 2,154 million; Air Force, 250 million. Allotments to Army included 720 million for all civil components.”⁹²

Providing economic and military aid to Korea, however, had a risk of flaming President Rhee’s aggression. The United States had to empower Korea to the degree of surviving as an independent democratic state but also had to contain it from attacking the North. Because the least desirable scenario for the US, as written in both NSC 8 and 8/2, was being involved in Korean affairs that might escalate to another World War, the US was cautious about giving too much credibility to President Rhee. In this sense, Allison, the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, emphasized the “compliance with the terms of Conclusions of NSC 8/2 the Department would not consider the furnishing of advisory personnel as a commitment” regarding Korea.⁹³ The situation went the same in the area of economic support as well. Dr. Bunce, the Officer in Charge of Korean Affairs in ECA, stressed that “the greatest obstacles with the Mission was confronted in dealing with President Rhee,” when quoting Mr. Street’s opinion that “President Rhee’s strongest weapon is his knowledge that the US could not let the Republic of Korea fall without incurring the gravest political repercussions.”⁹⁴ This haunted the US officials also because President Rhee’s incompetence in solving the inflationary threat and his attitude of blaming the US on the same matter seemed at least part of it due to this certainty. To contain President Rhee both from pursuing military ambition and

⁹² 895.00R/2-1050: Telegram [Document 10] The Chargé in Korea (Drumright) to the Secretary of State .. Feb 10, 1950.

⁹³ 795.5522/1-3150 [Document 8] The Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison) to the Director of the Office of FOreign Military Affairs, Office of the Secretary of Defense (Halaby). FRUS 1950.

⁹⁴ 895.B13/3-1550 [Document 13] Memorandum of Conversation, by the Officer in Charge of Korean Affairs (Bond). FRUS 1950.

being irresponsible on the economic crisis, the officials of the US even considered “using the threat of stoppage of military assistance as a weapon with the Korean Government,” since “such a threat might get more directly at the heart.”⁹⁵

Secretary of State Acheson’s speech at the National Press Club on January 12, 1950, was another message sent to President Rhee. In it, he defined the boundary of American defensive parameter as to Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines in the Pacific area, which “denied a guarantee US military protection to the Republic of Korea,” together with the Republic of China on Taiwan.⁹⁶ Because North Korea invaded the South within six months later, Acheson claimed that “it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas [beyond Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines] against military attack,” there has been a continuous debate on whether Acheson’s speech gave Pyongyang the positive signal to pursue forcible reunification. Regardless of how the message had been received by either North Korea or the Soviet Union, however, Acheson’s intention of the National Press Club speech was at least partly to “caution the South Koreans that the United States would not guarantee absolutely the ROK’s military security.”⁹⁷ The Secretary of State did point to Korea as a place “we have a greater opportunity to be effective,” in which the US could put into effect economic assistance and promote the development of democracy.⁹⁸ However, he did not want to send the wrong signal to President Rhee concerning that Rhee might resort to carrying out military aggression against the North for reunification. Acheson’s speech, in this sense, can be understood as one of the containment methods heading towards the ROK Government.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ James Matray. "Dean Acheson's Press Club Speech Reexamined." *Journal of Conflict Studies* 22.1 (2002) p. 28.

⁹⁷ George F. Kennan comment, 13 February 1954, Princeton Seminars, reel 1, tape 1, Acheson Papers, HSTL, p. 2; Ernest R. May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 65; Lloyd C. Gardner, "Introduction," *The Korean War* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), p. 17; J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 31; John W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), pp. 17-19. Re-cited from James Matray. "Dean Acheson's Press Club Speech Reexamined." *Journal of Conflict Studies* 22.1 (2002): 28-55.

⁹⁸ Dean Acheson. *Crisis in Asia*. Office of Public Affairs, Department of State, 1950. pp. 111-116.

A close inspection of the choices on the decision table between 1948 and 1950 enables a clear sight of what the United States was willing to commit to Korea. The *middle path* repeatedly cited on NSC documents indicates more of a path on economic assistance than on military commitment, reflecting Truman's postwar strategy in Asia to provide economic aids instead of armed power. The decision of the US on the matter of the Pacific Pact, a mutual defense agreement, the public enunciation of commitment to Korea, economic support, and military support commonly points that although the US intended to strengthen Korea to be competent in resisting Communist expansion, it restricted itself from making a military commitment.

Chapter 5. Commitment to World Order and the United Nations

Postwar planning of the United States began long before the ceasefire of World War II. Amidst the war, the United States confronted a situation in which it had to build a new order to maintain peace and fill the power vacuums of Britain, which was no longer competent in holding dominant leadership. Secretary Hull President Roosevelt had already been making plans for a new security system and American leadership through an advisory commission established in 1942 for postwar foreign policy (Deconde 1963). They proceeded slowly to develop congressional support, both among Republicans and Democrats, for concepts of collective security. By 1943, when the House of Representatives adopted a resolution for support for an international organization to keep peace with the U.S. being a member, and Senate called for the United States to participate and support an international organization "with power to prevent aggression and preserve the peace of the world,"⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Alexander DeConde. A history of American foreign policy. New York, Scribner, 1963. p. 181.

even isolationists endorsed the idea of collective security and the leadership of the United States to fulfill the ends.

The way that the United States had committed itself to the peace and world order can be examined threefold: multilateral agreements and declaration, public statements, and actions. One of the earliest agreements on the postwar order was the Atlantic Treaty. The Atlantic Charter was a joint declaration by the United States President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill released on August 14, 1941, after the two head meeting in Newfoundland. The Charter consists of the two governments' broad statement of war aims by publicly affirming the solidarity between the two against Axis aggregation. Although the Atlantic Charter was not a binding treaty, it contained messages of Wilsonian-vision for the postwar world, one that could be characterized by collective security.¹⁰⁰ What further strengthens its importance is the fact that the treaty had been a signal that the United States and Britain "were committed to supporting the restoration of self governments for all countries that had been occupied during the war and allowing all peoples to choose their own form of government."¹⁰¹ Being so, the Charter had been an inspiration for colonial subjects who fought for independence.¹⁰²

Moscow Declaration on October 1943 was another joint agreement committed on liberal order. In the declaration, the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and China exclaimed that they had the "responsibility to secure the liberation" of themselves and the allied people from aggression, "in accordance with the declaration by the United Nations of January, 1942."¹⁰³ Furthermore, they highlighted their recognition of "establishing and maintaining

¹⁰⁰ "The Atlantic Conference & Charter, 1941," Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institution, United States Department of State.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ A Decade of American Foreign Policy : Basic Documents, 1941-49. Prepared at the request of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. By the Staff of the Committee and the Department of State. Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1950.

international peace and security.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the necessity for establishing world order and peace had been written multiple times. After the first declaration for the general aim, the specific details were added that “for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security,” the joint four-nation would establish new law, order, and a system for the general security so they could constantly consult with one another and prepare for a collective action in case the community of nations requires.¹⁰⁵

The phrase on democracy was introduced afterward when President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Generalissimo Stalin reached an agreement in Crimea on February 11, 1945. The Agreement was an explicit commitment to two fundamental ideals: Democracy and peace. The text of the Yalta Conference Agreement clearly states that it is their “common interest” and a “mutual agreement” to solve political and economic problems of the countries in liberated Europe “by democratic means.”¹⁰⁶ What specified the democratic means was the creation of democratic institutions that people choose to make of their own will. Interestingly, rather than emphasizing the two ideals of democracy and peace respectively, a close connection was made between the two when the Agreement stated that “to create democratic institutions ... is a principle of the Atlantic Charter the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live ... [to] establish conditions of internal peace.”¹⁰⁷ Without exaggeration, the Yalta Conference Agreement clearly emphasized the participants, especially the United States, commitment to peace and order, as stated below reveals:

“By this declaration we reaffirm our faith in the principles of the Atlantic Charter, our pledge in the Declaration by the United Nations and our determination to build in cooperation with other peace-

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Yalta Conference Agreement, Declaration of a Liberated Europe,” February 11, 1945, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116176>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

loving nations world order, under law, dedicated to peace, security, freedom and general well-being of all mankind."¹⁰⁸

The commitment of the United States to the democratic ideal became more aggressive when its relationship with the Soviet Union went hostile. The original thought of Roosevelt to offer the Soviet Union a prominent place in postwar order was based on the assumption that Soviet hostility is a result of insecurity, and such insecurity stemmed from external threats (Gaddis 2005). Because the sources of threats were in Germany and Japan, and the Western aversion and refusal to Bolshevism, "granting the Russians their legitimate position in international affairs" would soothe its animosity.¹⁰⁹ Considering the possibility, Roosevelt saw a positive prospect of incorporating Moscow into a postwar security structure (Gaddis 2005). However, when these attempts did not work out as planned, the successor President Truman declared in its intention to make a "world-side commitment to resist Soviet expansionism wherever it appeared."¹¹⁰ Truman Doctrine was a public statement that manifested the new strategy. On March 12, 1947, Truman accounted to Congress for his pledge to contain communists in Greece and Turkey, implying American support for nations facing the threat of the Soviets.

The difficulty in Greece had begun in 1944 as the Germans pulled out and communists attacked to gain power. In August 1946, when Greece's northern neighbors went under Communist control, Greek Communist guerrillas began attacking the north part of the country. The Greece administration, unable to cope with the raiding, searched for external aid from British troops who remained (Deconde 1963). However, the British Government could not further support Greece due to its lack of financial and military competence, deciding to stop its economic aid. The aim of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ John Gaddis. *Strategies of containment: a critical appraisal of American national security policy during the Cold War*. Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 22.

Truman Doctrine, in this sense, was to fill this vacuum and appeal for financial and economic support to restore the internal order and security of Greece. The situation in Turkey was in no sense better. The Soviets have been arguing for the Turkish provinces Ardahan and Cars to be ceded to them since the areas were historically Russian, and when Turkey rejected them, the Communists began an anti-Turkish campaign (Deconde 1963). The British were no longer available to extend aid to Turkey. The integrity of Turkey being essential to the security of order in the Middle East and the independence of Greece critical to Europe, Truman made an urgent appeal for assistance to both Turkey and Greece in his Doctrine. Because it was one of the “primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States [to create] conditions in which [the United States] and other nations [being] able to work out a way of life free from coercion,” the investment in Greece and Turkey must be made in terms of “world freedom and world peace.”¹¹¹ The speech of Truman to both Congress and the broader audience of the United States and the world was a world commitment to resist Soviet expansionism (Gaddis 2005).

Military actions were also conducted to deter the Soviet expansion on the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. Following Stalin impelling Turkey and Iran for territorial concessions in 1946, Truman deployed battleship Missouri (BB-63), an iconic symbol of American military power, in waters surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean.¹¹² To make clear the determination that the U.S. would discourage aggressive Soviet actions, the establishment of the U.S. Sixth Task Fleet was made to induce the Soviets to withdraw troops from Iran and yield its demands for boundary concessions from Turkey. Moreover, the decision of the United States to remain its forces in Japan and Germany after some years of occupation was also based on an aim to deter a possible Soviet

¹¹¹ President Truman's Message to Congress; March 12, 1947; Document 171; 80th Congress, 1st Session; Records of the United States House of Representatives; Record Group 233; National Archives.

¹¹² The U.S. Navy in the Cold War Era, 1945-1991, By Edward J. Marla, Senior Historian, Naval Historical Center. Based on the chapter, "Cold War to Violent Peace," in W.J. Holland, Jr. ed. The Navy. Washington: Naval Historical Foundation, 2000. Posted with permission of the Naval Historical Foundation.

attack. Such presence of the U.S. army exhibited America's willingness to secure these countries through military means — conventional and nuclear weapons (Ohtomo 2012).

As seen from the discussion so far, the post-war period is characterized as expeditiously mounting aggression, and the United States took bold effort to stabilize the order and check the extension of Soviet invasion. The United Nations was one of the most potent instruments to assemble political and material support, reporting moral opprobrium against Communism's 'contraventions of independence and human rights (Finkelstein 1969). The basic framework and intention of the United Nations rested on Roosevelt's belief that major power — the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and China — could be central actors that provide leadership in the collective postwar security system.¹¹³ However, following the Communist expansion and Soviet hostility, the United Nations acted as an institutional device for securing democratic ideals among nations, defying the Soviets if necessary despite its permanent seat and membership of the United Nations Security Council. It is in this sense when Finkelstein emphasizes that "as conditions favored success by the United States in seeking endorsement of its purpose to prevent expansion of Communist power and to stabilize territorial arrangements after World War II," it turned to the "UN to legitimize the contingent threat to apply American force."¹¹⁴

The United States' commitment to the United Nations can be found in numerous documents and proclamations. Indeed, it is illustrated in Yalta Agreement when it clarified that "by this declaration we reaffirm ... our pledge in the Declaration by the United Nations."¹¹⁵ Truman, also in his speech to Congress, highlighted that "to ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations, [for] the United

¹¹³ The United States and the Founding of the United Nations, August 1941 - October 1945. Office of the Historian. Bureau of Public Affairs. U.S. Department of State. October 2005.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence Finkelstein. "International Cooperation in a Changing World: A Challenge to United States Foreign Policy." *International Organization* 23.3 (1969): p. 560.

¹¹⁵ Yalta Conference Agreement, Declaration of a Liberated Europe," February 11, 1945, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116176>

Nations is designed to make possible lasting freedom and independence for all its members.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, the United States was among four major Allied Powers — along with the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and China — to meet at Washington through August to October 1944 to structure the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals for a General International Organization, which later became the subject of the United Nations Conference at San Francisco on April 25, 1945, setting the basic aims and purposes of the United Nations. Not only words but also deeds were taken. United Nations peacekeeping began in the late 1940s with multinational forces gathering to deal with immediate post-war demands. In an international context where no full-scale collective security was enforced, the peacekeepers provided the UN with a "military" role.¹¹⁷ When the first mission to deploy military personnel was initiated amidst the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, the Truce Supervision Organization for Palestine (UNTSO) and the Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan (UNCIP — later becoming the nucleus of UNMOGIP) were sent to the conflict zones to separate the warring sides and observe the ceasefire agreement. Of all the member states, Belgium and the United States were the only two countries that contributed to both.¹¹⁸

It is true that the creation of a West German State, like the formation of NATO, carried considerable importance in freezing the Soviet forces from the center of the continent. In fact, it is phenomenal how the United States, once preoccupied with the United Nations Charter that intrigued so many policymakers, dropped the concern so immediately as the UN turned out to be irrelevant to the West in dealing with Soviet pressures in Europe. The central difficulty was that Soviet Union being set as a permanent member of the Security Council. From that fact, every action of allies ought to be enabled by the Council, which is under the veto power of the exact nation that was to be

¹¹⁶ President Truman's Message to Congress; March 12, 1947; Document 171; 80th Congress, 1st Session; Records of the United States House of Representatives; Record Group 233; National Archives.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Koops, et al., eds. *The Oxford handbook of United Nations peacekeeping operations*. Oxford Handbooks, 2015. p. 114.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 123. See also Resolution 47 (1948) / [adopted by the Security Council at its 286th meeting], of 21 April 1948.

contained. Western alliance, including the NATO, had to be compatible with the United Nations Article 53, legitimizing regional organizations, but the problem was that ‘no enforcement actions shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council.’ As an objection to being tied by the United Nations and its Charters, NATO communiqués expressed a discharge of the Charter and the UN itself after the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in September 1949 (Kaplan 1998). However, the period before 1950s was when the advocates of the United Nations still held enough power to confront the challenges. Despite the existence of opponents adhering to the security pact with Western Europe, the enthusiasts for the United Nations could “lead a receptive public to repudiate a seeming return to the balance-of-power politics that had brought on the First and Second World Wars. To preclude this possibility, the administration took steps to demonstrate that the treaty was not a return to the past but an effort to repair damage the Soviets had done to the proper function of the UN.” (Kaplan 1998) Although more harsh struggles were to happen in a few years, is not before the 1950s when the communiqués and adherents of NATO overwhelmed and disregarded the UN and its Charter altogether.

Now that we have seen what and how the United States committed itself to the world order, peace, democracy, and the United Nations, we may move to the next section and see how the commitments affected the UN commitment to Korea, and reversely, how the commitment to Korea again influenced US commitment to world order, peace, democracy, and the United Nations.

Chapter 6. Interactions and Recognition

The United States’ commitment to the order and peace based on the democratic ideal were not simple proclamations that could be withdrawn when situations change. When making commitments, states not only signal their intention to keep pledges but also expect the audience to interpret its signal in an intended manner. However, the audience may not give complete trust as long as there is always an

incentive — therefore possibility — for reneging in international contexts. Because the diversity of paths in which circumstances may change gives states excuses for an opportunistic behavior (Brunner et al. 2012), audience and recipients tend to be cautious in receiving signals of pledge, calculating for the credibility of the commitment. Although this assessment is not a binary choice between perfectly credible and perfectly incredible, what recipients choose as a point in the continuum becomes an essential factor in evaluating a pledge as sincere (Ibid, 2012). Therefore, for a state to expect the audience to believe its commitment, it is vital to strengthen its commitment in as much as to gain credibility. The fact that there had been numerous forms of agreements, treaties, public statements and declarations, and both economic and military aid from the United States explains how much it was willing to signal its credibility on the commitment to postwar order towards domestic and international audiences.

Was it successful in persuasion? There should be a careful inspection on whether and how such efforts of the United States turned out to be effective in building credibility. Among multiple factors that simultaneously affect the assessment process, Forder (2001) highlights *reputation* and *commitments devices* as two essential criteria that determine the perceived credibility. A state can establish its reputation of credibility by building up a history of compliance in political transactions. Person and Tabellini (1994) further suggest that if the incentives of reputation are strong enough, there need to be no additional measures are required. However, when a state's reputation is lacking or low, commitment devices, including various ties and bonds carefully designed to strengthen the credibility, can be implemented in addition. Although not using the same terminology, Kydland and Prescott (1977) describe the critical concept of commitment devices as "institutional arrangements that make it a difficult and time-consuming to change the policy rules in all but emergency situations."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Finn Kydland and Edward C. Prescott. "Rules rather than discretion: The inconsistency of optimal plans." *Journal of political economy* 85.3 (1977): p. 487.

In the case of the United States, reputation itself was not sufficient to give full credibility to its pledges. Not because the United States had been insincere in keeping its commitments. It was the lack of time and opportunities for the United States to build up its *history* of reputation. The war had ended only a few years ago, and there was no significant military conflict that the United States would prove its credibility. Moreover, it has not been a few years since the United States appeared in the international arena after abandoning its non-interventionism and isolationism that lasted more than a century. Until the United States publicly expressed the principle of national self-determination in the late war and raised international public opinion, secret diplomacy and the balance of power had maintained Europe in the last century (Pederson 2015). Many treaties had been made were gone within months and years, eventually leading rulers to irresponsible behavior and making the violation of agreements an international custom. The domestic and international audiences who were experiencing an unprecedented international order after World War II, in this sense, had limited time to evaluate whether the United States was going to be sincere in keeping its commitments without reneging when situations change.

Therefore, the United States had to devise a commitment device in setting rules “that do not permit leeway for violating commitments.”¹²⁰ As North and Weingast (1989) insist, compliance problems can be reduced when institutions, as a commitment device, are deliberately selected to match the incentive issue. Unlike NATO, in which the United States did not plan from the beginning of its formation, the United Nations was set and designed amidst World War II with the intention of promoting democracy and peaceful postwar order (Finkelstein 1969). The United Nations did serve such a purpose — at least in a limited sense — when it played “the role of custodian of the seals of international approval and disapproval,”¹²¹ enabling collective legitimization as its political function.

¹²⁰ Douglass North and Barry R. Weingast. "Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing public choice in seventeenth-century England." *The journal of economic history* 49.4 (1989): p. 804.

¹²¹ Inis L. Claude. "Collective legitimization as a political function of the United Nations." *International organization* 20.3 (1966): pp. 371-372.

What is more, the UN provided law and political morality that buttressed the justifiability of such a liberal and democratic ideal (Claude 1966). However, the United Nations, too, faced a problem. Just as the reputation building of the United States required time and opportunity, the international society also had to gain experience “with its new institutions, particularly their predictability and commitment to secure rights, expectations over future actions began to reflect the new order.”¹²² Thus the United Nations was not a complete commitment device but an incomplete growing device that was also building up its reputation to gain credibility.

To put it simply, the United States was enrolling in a project that required *more* reputation than it currently possessed. Therefore, reneging from commitments would not only damage the United States' reputation but also defy its project of global norm-formation altogether. Thus, the burden was twofold: the United States had to not give up on the pledges that it had previously made, while at the same time collecting more opportunities to accumulate a history of compliance, both in its name and in the name of the United Nations. The former would provide a possibility to *secure* its reputation, and the latter would *strengthen* it. The Korean issue was a case positioned on both sides. Keeping its original middle path before the Korean War was to secure its reputation, but when the critical event outbreak, securing and strengthening both depended on the United States' decision to engage in the Korean War. Leaving South Koreans at the hands of Communists would degrade its reputation, making it less possible to sustain its position as a global peacekeeper. On the other hand, further committing to Korea by participating in the Korean War would secure its reputation and strengthen it by exhibiting a clear signal of helping a nation whose democracy and peace are in urgent need. Similar logic plays in terms of the United Nations as well. While leaving South Korea to the domination of communism would degrade its reputation as an institute, which stands for each nations' liberation and peaceful maintenance, aiding the country would strengthen its reputation by proving

¹²² Douglass North and Barry R. Weingast. "Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing public choice in seventeenth-century England." *The journal of economic history* 49.4 (1989): pp. 823-824.

its executive capacity in peacekeeping. Both the United States and the United Nations required more than reputation status-quo, which justified their military engagement.

Commitments are intermingled within their ecosystem and modified in search of consistency. However, the fact does not necessarily indicate that an actor is aware of such a process. What the United States had *recognized* was itself committing to Korea in connection to its commitment to world order, peace, and the United Nations. For instance, the NSC 8 document on April 2, 1948, clarifies that the position of the United States concerning Korea is based on “international commitments of the U.S., both within and without the framework of the UN.”¹²³ A year later, the NSC 8/2 document on March 22, 1949, writes, “Soviet-backed Communist control throughout all of Korea ... [would] adversely affect the position of the U.S. ... throughout the Far East,” adding that “such disengagement would be interpreted as a betrayal by the U.S. of its friends and allies in the Far East” and that the “overthrow by Soviet-dominated forces of a government established in south Korea under the aegis of the UN would ... constitute a severe blow to the prestige and influence” of the UN.¹²⁴ In the same year, Muccio sent a message to President Rhee noting, “The United States regards the Korean problem as one of international concern.”¹²⁵ It can also be known that Korea had been aware of such fact when Chairman Shin stressed “that the United States should give to democratic nations fighting against communism help,”¹²⁶ when he requested additional commitment of the United States to Korea. To sum up, the United States recognized Korea in terms of international concern, Korea recognized the United States’ recognition, and the United States recognized Korea recognizing its recognition.

¹²³ NSC 8 Report by the National Security Council to the President. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, Vol. VI.

¹²⁴ NSC 8/2 Report by the National Security Council to the President. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1949, Vol. VII, Part II

¹²⁵ Ibid. 740.00119 Control (Korea)/4-1659 [Document 220] The Special Representative in Korea (Muccio) to the President of the Republic of Korea

¹²⁶ 123 Jesus, Philip C. [Document 7] The Ambassador in Korea (Muccio) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950. Vol. VII.

However, what the United States had *not recognized* was there already being a military commitment to Korea — although not to a full degree in as much to directly confront the Soviets — formulated as a result of an interaction between commitments. That is, the United States did not recognize an involuntary military *locking* that had entrapped it into a costly foreign conflict. Despite his intention to contain President Rhee from attempting forced unification, Acheson did not intend to deceive both domestic and international audiences when he outlined the defensive parameter running through Japan, the Ryukus, and the Philippines in his National Press Club speech (Matray 2002). What Acheson attempted to deliver was the message that the United States would not guarantee Korea's military security, or, in other words, "that the United States had no intention of fighting for South Korea."¹²⁷ Evaluating South Korea as having a little strategic importance and pulling out military forces from Korea for their deployment to a more critical area was also based on a similar consideration (Schnabel 1972). As previously seen, from 1948 to 1950, the United States had deliberately avoided military commitment to Korea and instead focused its assistance program on economic and financial aid. Its continuous decision to refuse options that require military commitment illustrates that the United States intended to back off from Korea in case of military engagement, and the underlying assumption was that the United States is able to retrieve and withdraw its military commitments from the area — which turned out to be false. Although commitments at the world order and peace within the democratic ideal have changed its incentive structure and thus its degree of commitment to Korea, the officials were making decisions without recognizing the alteration.

Becker's (1960) frame of *commitment by default* provides a plausible explanation of the United States' behavior. While illustrating how the commitments form and develop within their interaction, he proposes that a series of acts — although each of them may be trivial — can cumulate

¹²⁷ James Schnabel. *Policy and Direction: The first year*. Vol. 3. Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1972. p. 52.

to affect an actor hardly pursue other paths that might result in conflict. Similar role conflict theory has been developed by other scholars (Farrel & Rusbult 1981; Hrebiniak & Alutto 1972) that explain how actors “experience role conflict when he/she has simultaneous occurrence of two or more roles such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other.”¹²⁸ However, what differentiates Becker from others is that he highlights the *unconscious* aspect in such dynamic. Because some commitments are made by default, an actor may both consciously and unconsciously commit (Jeong 1990). Becker notes that actors can “make the commitment without realizing it,”¹²⁹ claiming that such automatic commitments could be there “even though [an actor] does not become aware of it until faced with an important decision.”¹³⁰ What should be noticed here is a moment of decision that alarms an actor to be aware of the unconscious commitment. Becker also mentions that recognizing an actor of the involvement is a major component in creating consistency among commitments. Indeed, there had been a turning point in the United States as well: June 25, 1950.

After six and a half hours after the North Korean troops crossed into the South, a telegram was sent from the Office of the Military Attaché in Seoul to General MacArthur. The immediate report to Washington followed, and MacArthur, within his authority, ordered General Walter to load arms supplies to South Korea (Schnabel 1972). On the next day, Ernest Gross, the Deputy Representative of the United States, outlined events that are ongoing in the ROK to the United Nations Security Council with a resolution to bring about “all members to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution and to refrain from giving assistance to the North Korean authorities,”¹³¹ for a restoration of the 38th Parallel. At the same time, the Department of State representatives planned to support South Korea with US naval and air forces on June 25 to

¹²⁸ Yeon-Ang Jeong, "Commitment and Multiple Commitments: Theoretical Perspectives." *Journal of industrial relations* 1 (1990). p. 267.

¹²⁹ Howard S Becker. "Notes on the concept of commitment." *American journal of Sociology* 66.1 (1960): p. 38.

¹³⁰ Ibid. pp. 36-37.

¹³¹ James F. Schnabel. *Policy and Direction: The first year*. Vol. 3. Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1972. Pp. 66-67.

evacuate Americans in Korea and gain time before the United Nations took measures (Schnabel 1972). Although the initial plan was to send a ground force to combat the situation and restore the 38th Parallel *when* the United Nations asked member states to send military force, the United States soon figured that “South Korea needed help at once, and the United Nations could hardly act swiftly enough.”¹³² Furthermore, the initial decision on June 25 to deploy air and naval units to Korea “established a precedent for the later commitment of U.S. bound troops.”¹³³ Guided by such decisions, the United States engaged in combat operations in an independent course that later synchronized with the plans of the United Nations.

Before the full-scale invasion of North Korean armies, the United States made a choice on the degree of the commitment to Korea. Defying the military commitment and assisting Korea only through economic and financial aid was its choice made within the spectrum of fully committing and complete neglecting. The phrase “middle path” written in NSC 8/2 document is symbolic of the United States’ decision. However, when the war outbreak, there became no spectrum on the degree of commitments, but only the binary choice of engagement and disengagement were left in the decision table. Recognizing the circumstance, telegrams from Ambassadors in other areas where the United States had labeled as “strategically important area,” telegram Washington shortly after the news of the North Korean invasion. The Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Kirk, telegram to the Secretary of State on June 25 that ROK being “a creation of US policy and of US-led UN action, ... we feel therefore, that we are called upon to make clear the world, and without delay, that we are prepared upon request to assist ROK maintain its independence by all means at our disposal, including military help and vigorous action in UNSC.” He also noted — a contrast to the United States’ past decision to restrain public declaration of a commitment to Korea — that the United States should

¹³² Ibid. p. 68.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 70.

make a “public declaration our willingness to assist in any feasible way desired by ROK.”¹³⁴ The Acting Political Adviser in Japan, Sebald, wrote a similar letter. Emphasizing the need for sending US troops, Sebald stated “we believe that US forces should be used even though this risks Russian counter moves. To sit by while Korea is overrun by unprovoked armed attack would start disastrous chain of events leading most probably to world war.”¹³⁵ The Ambassador from France and elsewhere from Europe had further agreed upon the matter.

With all the telegrams from abroad, Washington’s assessment on June 25 was not so different from others. A report of Intelligence Estimate Prepared by the Estimates Group in the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, was as follows:

“A severe blow would be dealt US prestige throughout Asia and the encouragement which has been felt in widely scattered areas in consequence of the promise of more active American support of anti-Communist forces would be reversed. Equally important, the feeling would grow among South East Asian peoples that the USSR is advancing invincibly, and there would be a greatly increased impulse to “get on the bandwagon.” ... The consequences of the invasion will be most important in Japan. ... Japanese reactions to the invasion will depend almost entirely upon the course of action pursued by the United States since they will regard the position taken by the United States as presaging US action should Japan be threatened with invasion. Failure of the United States to take any action in Korea would strengthen existing widespread desire for neutrality. ... [Moreover] Success of the current Soviet-sponsored invasion of South Korea will cause significant damage to US prestige in Western Europe. The capacity of a small Soviet satellite to engage in a military adventure

¹³⁴ 795.00/6-2550: Telegram [Document 72] The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Kirk) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Affairs of the United States*, 1950, Vol. VII.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 795.00/6-2550: Telegram [Document 73] The Acting Political Adviser in Japan (Sebald) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VII

challenging, as many Europeans will see it, the might and will of the US, can only lead to serious questioning of what might and will."¹³⁶

Because "the South Korean forces are ... militarily inferior to the North Korean forces and are not considered capable of offering more than limited resistance," it was becoming more confident that "within a short period force a break at some point in the defense line, the eventual loss of Seoul, and the collapse of organized resistance."¹³⁷ The decision had to be urgently made, and every report from both Washington and abroad coherently required for the United States to engage in the combat. It was in this sense when President Truman finally called upon the officials, "everyone felt that whatever had to be done to meet the aggression in Korea should be done."¹³⁸ As Schnabel writes in his paper, "no one suggested that the United Nations or the United States back away from the challenge."¹³⁹

What the United States did *not recognize*, moreover, when deciding to confront the North Korean army, was that the engagement to the Korean War would not only *secure* but also *strengthen* its commitment to world order, peace, and the United Nations. Numerous documents mentioned above commonly state that the United States is concerned about its blow-off of prestige in not committing to Korea. Interestingly, none of the papers say how the involvement of United States troops would benefit or strengthen its reputation in international relations. Although there had been concerns about the "preservation of the prestige"¹⁴⁰ from its "irretrievable

¹³⁶ 795.00/6-2750 [Document 82] Intelligence Estimate Prepared by the Estimates Group, Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VII.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ James F. Schnabel. *Policy and Direction: The first year*. Vol. 3. Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1972. p. 69.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 69.

¹⁴⁰ 895B.13/4-2580 [Document 27] The Chargé in Korea (Drumright) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VII.

impair,”¹⁴¹ “significant damage,”¹⁴² or simple “reduce,”¹⁴³ there were no signs regarding its invigoration. In other words, the strategic aim of the United States when deciding to participate in the Korean War was made as a negative statement — not to let its prestige downfall — as opposed to a positive statement — to raise its prestige —. What mattered to the officials was not a benefit but a fear of damaging its current prestige. Strengthening the United States’ reputation by the military commitment to Korea, in this sense, was an unexpected surplus.

The same logic that haunted the United States of losing its reputation became its fortune. Audiences were looking to see whether the United States’ commitments in the past were being upheld to reevaluate their decisions when new information is revealed (Allee and Reinhardt 2011). Unlike actors who have accumulated enough data to certify its credentials, the newcomers have only limited number of exemplifying cases. The United States fits this case. Because it lacked the time and opportunity to prove its credibility, each chance of behavioral exhibition was an important determinant in evaluating reputation. The assessment, however, can both be positive or negative. As Allee and Peignhardt states, the compliance of the commitments could be a critical factor in a decision to “stimulate greater investment.”¹⁴⁴ Just as reneging behavior would have been more detrimental in the United States’ prestige due to its lack of history, its compliance behavior turned out to be more beneficial on its reputation for the same reason. The weakness of the United States not having sufficient proofs or precedents of responsive behavior became an advantage when it dispatched troops to Korea, showing how much it was willing to keep its commitments.

¹⁴¹ 795.00/6-2650: Telegram. [Document 100] The Ambassador in France (Bruce) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VII.

¹⁴² 795.00/6-2750 [Document 82] Intelligence Estimate Prepared by the Estimates Group, Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VII.

¹⁴³ 795.00/7-150: Telegram. [Document 194] The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Kirk) to the Secretary of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1950. Vol. VII.

¹⁴⁴ Todd Allee and Clint Peinhardt. “Contingent credibility: The impact of investment treaty violations on foreign direct investment.” *International Organization* 65.3 (2011): p. 402.

Indeed, Jervis (1980) claims “the Korean War shaped the course of the cold war by both resolving the incoherence which characterized U.S. foreign and defense efforts in the period 1946-1950,” while highlighting that “without Korea, international history would have been very different.”¹⁴⁵ For both the United States and the United Nations, the Korean War was a chance to prove their ability and willingness to confront the Communists going against global peace. The United States and the United Nations’ commitment to “police action” encompassed “the application of coercive measures — diplomatic, economic, financial or military — to bring the aggression to an end.”¹⁴⁶ The Korean War was the first case of *actual use* in such measures. Unlike Iran in 1946-1947, in which the application of American force was legitimized by the theme of police action, Korea in 1950 went beyond legitimization to the actual use of police force (Finkelstein 1969). Because most members were not prepared to join in the military action even in the name of the United Nations, the United States had to play a dominant role to avoid weakening the institution altogether (Goodrich 1953).

Such action intensified both the United States’ and the United Nations’ prestige. First, the United Nations as a collective agency proved that its commitment to world order is not a mere proclamation. Although the United States first and foremost deployed troops, it nevertheless conducted its mission in the name of United Nations through its three years of engagement. Second, the United States, by playing such a dominant role in peacekeeping with the name of the United Nations, showed its strong commitment to the United Nations and its members. The Korean War exhibited that even with other nations unprepared to confront military aggression, the United Nations could still act as an institutional device of world peace and order with the United States’ ability to implement hard power. Third, the United States proved itself competent and sincere in keeping

¹⁴⁵ Robert Jervis. "The impact of the Korean War on the Cold War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24.4 (1980): p. 563.

¹⁴⁶ Leland Goodrich. "The United Nations and the Korean War: A Case Study." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 25.2 (1953): p. 95-96.

previous commitments to world peace and democratic order. Not only did it propose the necessity of resolution regarding the Korean War to the world, but it was also the first to dispatch air, naval, and ground forces to Korea. 36,568 United States men were killed and missing during 1950-1953 in Korea, and 103,284 were wounded.¹⁴⁷ This number far exceeds the total UNC forces casualties, in which 3,063 were dead and missing and 11,817 wounded¹⁴⁸

A vast increase in the defense budget amid and after the war further strengthened the United States 'credibility. A dramatic shock pressed domestic resistance. Korea formed public support on the United States 'enlarged budget since the Communist threat turned out to be more vivid than expected (Jervis 1980). The fact that the US troops deployed in Korea required a great deal of money to maintain fighting also justified the military budget increase. The NSC 68 document from the Department of State and Department of Defense presented to President Truman on April 7, 1950, which emphasized the necessity to increase major budget before Korea, gained unprecedented public support that changed the political climate in this context (Jervis 1980). Both the officials and public understood that "by strongly implying that it would not defend Korea, the United States had invited attack."¹⁴⁹ There should be no more similar error. Domino theory that prevailed in the United States explained the importance of preventing even a small shift in the status quo, and developing deterrence theory persuaded that it was possible. It was in this sense that defense expenditures have increased more than threefold under Trumans 'operational plan, and the United States deepened and broadened the American involvement in Asia-Pacific region (Miller & With 2020). In short, the United States embraced the need for extended commitments in threatened areas and "stake[d] its reputation on meeting force with force, and thereby deter adventurism."¹⁵⁰ By tying their hands and sinking extra

¹⁴⁷ Allan Millett. "Korean War". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 18 Jun. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>. Accessed 20 November 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Jervis. "The impact of the Korean War on the Cold War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24.4 (1980): p. 581.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 581.

costs, the United States created repetitional costs that they will suffer if they renege from the commitments (Fearon 1997). Just like there had been involuntary locking that entrapped the United States into costly foreign conflicts, such locking unintentionally strengthened the United States' previous commitments making it more credible.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

So far, I have examined the puzzle of the United States' foreign policy regarding the Korean War. The central question revolved around why the United States immediately returned with the outbreak of war, given its recognition of Korea as a strategically unimportant area. Although attempts have been made to explain this behavior as misunderstanding and simple inconsistency, I have shown how they failed to provide a persuasive explanation of the United States' behavioral change. Instead, I proposed that consistency can be found within the contradictory behavior of the United States, considering an evolving ecosystem of commitments. When the US recognized its commitment to Korea in the face of the critical decision to engage in the Korean War, the costs of noninvolvement were so expensive that reneging was no longer a possible alternative. The United States' strategic behavior, in this sense, was neither a mere misunderstanding nor inconsistency but an awakening of the awareness of its modified commitment. At the same time, returning to Korea showed that the United States was sincere in keeping its commitments to democracy, peace, and the UN. The United States decided to enter the Korean War to secure its prestige, but its engagement unintentionally strengthened its credibility and reputation by creating a precedent for accountability. In brief, an involuntary locking entrapped the United States into costly missions in the Korean War, and this locking unintentionally strengthened its reputation within the ecosystem of commitments. Korea might not be an exceptional case, for the United States engaged in numerous foreign conflicts for

decades afterward. To avoid unexpected automatic commitments in foreign relations, knowing when and how commitments intermingle and adjust to each other is essential.

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Abstract

1948-50 년 미국의 한국 철수 및 귀환: 모순에 내재된 일관성에 관하여

2 차 대전 직후, 미국은 자국의 전략상 요충지로 한국을 포함하는 결정을 의도적으로 유보했다. 그러나 1950 년 6 월 25 일, 한국전쟁이 발발하자 미국은 즉각 군대를 배치하여 3 년 간 전쟁을 이어갔다. 본 논문은 이처럼 상충되어 보이는 당대 미국의 대한 전략 내부에 일관성이 있다고 상정하며, 해당 일관성의 배경으로 전략적 약속들(commitments) 사이 유기적 생태계를 주목한다. 민주주의, 평화, 그리고 유엔 각각에 대한 미국의 약속은 자동적으로 한국에 대한 높은 수준의 헌신으로 이어졌으며, 그로써 미국의 전략적 선택지를 제한했다. 한국 전쟁의 발발과 한국군의 빠른 후퇴는 미국이 이전에는 인식하지 못했던 제약을 자각하게 된 주요한 계기였다. 즉, 본 논문은 당대 미국을 둘러싼 비자발적인 약속이 한국전쟁 개입이라는 결과로 이어진 동학을 서술하고, 이러한 동학이 어떤 방식으로 미국에 대한 국제사회의 신뢰를 제고하였는지 설명한다.