

# STUDENT ESSAY

THIS PAPER IS AN INDIVIDUAL EFFORT ON THE PART OF A STUDENT AT THE US ARMY WAR COLLEGE. IT IS FURNISHED WITHOUT COMMENT BY THE COLLEGE FOR SUCH BENEFIT TO THE USER AS MAY ACCRUE.

22 April 1966

## THE DECISION TO DISMISS GENERAL MacARTHUR

By

CHARLES M. SIMPSON, III

Lieutenant Colonel, Infantry

JUL 21 1966

U S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE



REPRODUCTION OF THIS DOCUMENT IN WHOLE OR IN PART IS PROHIBITED EXCEPT WITH PERMISSION OF THE COMMANDANT, US ARMY WAR COLLEGE.

US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA

Copy No. 1 of 12 Copies

AWC LOG #  
66-4-115(B) U

DTIC<sup>®</sup> has determined on 

Month	Day	Year
10	22	2008

 that this Technical Document has the Distribution Statement checked below. The current distribution for this document can be found in the DTIC<sup>®</sup> Technical Report Database.

- ☒ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A.** Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.
- ☐ **© COPYRIGHTED.** U.S. Government or Federal Rights License. All other rights and uses except those permitted by copyright law are reserved by the copyright owner.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT B.** Distribution authorized to U.S. Government agencies only. Other requests for this document shall be referred to controlling office.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT C.** Distribution authorized to U.S. Government Agencies and their contractors. Other requests for this document shall be referred to controlling office.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT D.** Distribution authorized to the Department of Defense and U.S. DoD contractors only. Other requests shall be referred to controlling office.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT E.** Distribution authorized to DoD Components only. Other requests shall be referred to controlling office.
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT F.** Further dissemination only as directed by controlling office or higher DoD authority.
- Distribution Statement F is also used when a document does not contain a distribution statement and no distribution statement can be determined.*
- ☐ **DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT X.** Distribution authorized to U.S. Government Agencies and private individuals or enterprises eligible to obtain export-controlled technical data in accordance with DoDD 5230.25.

USAWC RESEARCH ELEMENT  
(Essay)

The Decision to Dismiss General MacArthur

by

Lt Col Charles M. Simpson, III  
Infantry

US Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania  
22 April 1966



## SUMMARY

In April 1951, President Truman dismissed General Douglas MacArthur from four military assignments of great responsibility, including the Commander in Chief of United Nations forces in Korea. At that time, the decision was received with great emotional reaction among members of the Administration, the Congress, the American public, and our allies.

During the ensuing 15 years, it is possible to see with greater clarity that the issue was a head-on collision between the followers of two quite different national policies and national strategies. It is clear that General MacArthur did undertake to place his position before the American public while still occupying an appointive position under the Administration, and that President Truman quite rightly removed him from that position. It is somewhat less clear just exactly what the positions of the two protagonists were, due largely to the millions of words of testimony which were placed in the Hearings on the Senate Investigation.

This essay outlines the military, political, psychological, and foreign policy factors which contributed to President Truman's decision to dismiss General MacArthur. It emphasizes the two strategies and the differences in policy which each advocated. The personalities of the decisionmakers, insofar as they bear on the conflict, are outlined, and the forces which were brought to bear on the decisionmakers are delineated.

The major aspects and conclusions of this strategic crisis are compared with the situation which faces us today to derive some meaningful conclusions from a historical event which is strongly related to modern strategy.



## THE DECISION TO DISMISS GENERAL MACARTHUR

Today the world is giving its attention to a strategic debate which is being waged in the halls of Congress, the editorial pages of newspapers, academic forums, campus "sit-in's," and the very streets of our principal cities. The majority of knowledgeable Americans are deeply concerned with the question of American strategy in Southeast Asia. The issue behind the debate revolves around the question of whether United States policy will lead us to direct confrontation with Communist China and result in war with that nation, the earth's most populous and most avowedly Communist.

Inevitably, today's debate is linked to the Great Debate of 1951, which took place immediately following President Truman's dismissal of Far East Commander General Douglas MacArthur. Editorialists occasionally quote from the Senate hearings on United States strategy which followed that event. Voices are raised once again in behalf of General MacArthur's strategy, asserting that he was right and that we should have fought China in 1951, when China was relatively weaker and not a member of the atomic club. Frequently MacArthur is misquoted, and his strategy misunderstood. Due to the passage of time the strategy of the United States in 1951 and the reasons for the President's drastic action are also misinterpreted and incorrectly stated.

The events which led President Truman to assert his authority over the Asiatic-oriented General MacArthur, were centered on strategy. The immediate cause for MacArthur's dismissal was his calculated

insubordination. To discover the other military, political, international, and psychological causes, it is necessary to go back to 1951, and look at the forces which came to bear on the problem. This is useful in gaining an understanding of the forces which bear on our current problem, for strategy cannot be isolated from the people who formulate it and the pressures and experiences which in turn bear on them.

A haze of emotion and political smoke still covers the main issues of President Truman's decision to dismiss General MacArthur. Although fifteen years have passed, it will undoubtedly be many more years before it is possible to fully assess the gains and losses of this dramatic episode. It is possible to reconstruct the facts and events as they existed at the time the decision was made, and outline the factors which primarily affected the decisionmaking process, although this may result in oversimplification. Concentrating on those facts which were known to the decisionmakers prior to 11 April 1951, and separating them in the three major areas of military affairs, politics, and foreign affairs, should result in a useful analysis for future strategists and decisionmakers.

In June 1950, the invasion of the Republic of Korea by the North Korean People's Army caused President Truman to query his Commander in Chief of the Far East Command, General MacArthur, on the necessity for sending United States forces to the assistance of the South Koreans. Although General MacArthur did not have responsibility for the Republic of Korea, he recommended immediate air and sea assistance, and a few days later, intervention by United States ground forces.

President Truman approved these recommendations and was successful in achieving United Nations sponsorship of the intervention, whereupon he appointed General MacArthur Commander in Chief of United Nations forces. He also extended General MacArthur's United States area of responsibility to include Korea and Formosa.

In July 1950, General MacArthur visited Formosa to confer with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, without obtaining prior clearance from Washington or the United Nations. Though no political or military results were announced, a flurry of speculation and commentary followed in the press, which was answered by Washington only with some difficulty. Old wounds regarding Nationalist China and Formosa were opened to the irritation of Washington authorities, the delight of the political opposition, and the alarm of America's allies. The issue concerned the Administration's wish to neutralize Formosa, while MacArthur was said to favor using the forces of Chiang in a more aggressive role. Presidential adviser W. Averell Harriman immediately flew to Tokyo to brief General MacArthur on United States policy. On 14 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff by message reaffirmed Harriman's brief, and told MacArthur:

that the intent of the directive to him to defend Formosa was to limit United States action there to such support operations as would be practicable without committing any forces to the island itself. No commitments were to be made to the National /sic/ Government for the basing of fighter squadrons on Formosa, and no United States forces of any kind were to be based ashore on Formosa except with the specific approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, p. 354.



On 26 August, MacArthur forwarded a speech on request to be read to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention on 28 August, in which he urged that Formosa be defended and used for possible offensive strategy. The President was shown a copy of the proposed release and ordered it withdrawn, but too late to prevent the message from being published in full in several periodicals.

In October 1950, President Truman flew to Wake Island to meet General MacArthur for the first time and to reassure himself that the General saw "the worldwide picture as we saw it in Washington."<sup>2</sup> He returned with expressions of confidence in MacArthur's loyalty to the Administration's policies. In November the Chinese Communist People's Army intervened in the Korean War in massive numbers. MacArthur immediately requested permission to interdict the bridges across the Yalu River and to attack Chinese air bases in Manchuria. This was denied. From November to December, MacArthur complained publicly and bitterly in news releases and exclusive interviews concerning the orders barring him from attacking the Manchurian bases of the Red Chinese. President Truman issued a directive on 5 December 1950, to all governmental agencies that

Until further written notice from me . . . no speech, no press release, or other public statement concerning foreign policy should be released until it has received clearance from the Department of State.<sup>3</sup>

On 6 December 1950, a second Presidential directive to the Executive Department ordered

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 383.

officials overseas, including military commanders and diplomatic representatives . . . to exercise extreme caution in public statements, to clear all but routine statements with their departments, and to refrain from direct communication on military or foreign policy with newspapers, magazines, or other publicity media in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

On 7 March 1951, MacArthur made a statement to reporters predicting a bloody stalemate unless major additions were made to his forces and new policies formulated by the United Nations. On 20 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified MacArthur that diplomatic efforts by the United Nations would be made toward a settlement of the Korean War before U. N. forces once again advanced north of the 38th Parallel. On 24 March, MacArthur issued a release which announced his willingness to confer in the field with the enemy commander in chief to find a military means of realizing the political objectives of the United Nations without further bloodshed. The release also warned of possible dire consequences to Red China should it fail to comply. This offer was not cleared with Washington or the United Nations and proved to be entirely at cross-purposes with the negotiations being conducted in Washington, at Lake Success and in the other capitals of the world. On the 24th of March, a directive from the JCS reminded MacArthur of the directive of 6 December, and ordered him to coordinate his releases with Washington as previously ordered. On 5 April, a letter to Congressman Martin, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, written by MacArthur on 20 March, was read on the floor of the House. Martin had written

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

MacArthur and stated, among other things, that it was sheer folly not to use Chinese Nationalist troops in Korea. MacArthur replied:

My views and recommendations with respect to the situation created by Red China's entry into war against us in Korea have been submitted to Washington in most complete detail. Generally those views are well-known and generally understood, as they follow the conventional pattern of meeting force with maximum counterforce as we have never failed to do in the past. Your view with respect to the utilization of the Chinese forces on Formosa is in conflict with neither logic nor this tradition. It seems strangely difficult for some to realize that here in Asia is where the Communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest, and that we have joined the issue thus raised on the battlefield; that here we fight Europe's war with arms while the diplomats there still fight it with words; that if we lose this war to communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable, win it and Europe most probably would avoid war and yet preserve freedom. As you point out, we must win. There is no substitute for victory.<sup>5</sup>

On 10 April, President Truman, in conference with Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Secretary of Defense George Marshall, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley, and Presidential Adviser W. Averell Harriman, reached his decision to dismiss General MacArthur and return him to the United States. Due to a report of a leak of this decision to a newspaper, the decision was released early in the morning of 11 April 1951, to a special news conference.

The above chronology clearly reveals that the immediate cause for the relief of General MacArthur was disobedience of orders. President Truman, as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces recognized the fact that the general was in disagreement with the policy of the government, but the fact which led him to relieve MacArthur was "challenging

---

<sup>5</sup>Douglas MacArthur, Reminiscences, p. 386.



this policy in open insubordination to his Commander in Chief."<sup>6</sup> MacArthur was ordered repeatedly to clear all statements on military policy, other than the purely routine, through the Department of Defense. He chose to disobey his orders and carry his case to the American public and the world while still occupying a position of authority in the government. General MacArthur rationalized this disobedience of orders, albeit sincerely, before the Massachusetts Legislature in Boston on 25 July 1951, when he said:

I find in existence a new and heretofore unknown and dangerous concept that the members of our armed forces owe primary allegiance and loyalty to those who temporarily exercise the authority of the executive branch of the government, rather than to the country and its Constitution which they are sworn to defend.

The statement was post facto, but the attitude was very much in evidence from November 1950, until his dismissal. Such an attitude was intolerable to the military officers of the JCS, the equally military Secretary of Defense, and the tradition-minded President.

Since strategic decisions are made by men, something of the principal characters directly involved and their beliefs and experiences, is important to the issue underlying the immediate cause for this decision.

#### PHILOSOPHY

Though General MacArthur was well-known to the American public of fifteen years ago, there are certain facets of his career and

---

<sup>6</sup>Truman, op. cit., p. 447.

personality which are best revealed by his critics and intimates, not his public information officers, and as a result were not so widely known. The biographers of General MacArthur generally rank with his PIOs, not his critics. General MacArthur's career has been notable from a military viewpoint for his rapid elevation to high rank and positions of great responsibility, long tenure in the public limelight, long exposure to civilian authority, and the length of his service in the Far East. His extended military service, 1899 to 1951, most certainly shaped the character of the five-star general of 1951, but before this service began there was a well established tradition of soldiering in his family. The soldier son of a soldier son, MacArthur was born and raised in the Army and literally lived and breathed its beliefs and traditions from his birth until his dismissal. His thinking, schooling, and experience were exclusively those of a soldier. This is a fact of primary importance when attempting to understand the complex-seeming character of this man in the light of other than military factors. A belief in the application of force, the instinctive use of military logic, dedication to country and duty, willingness to accept responsibility, the tendency to look to tradition and history for solutions for today's problems, pride in self, and loyalty to command, the Army, and the uniform are a few of the traits derived from his heritage. His long experience in the Far East, fourteen years without returning to his native land, and the service of his father in that same area oriented him to that part of the world. His wartime command in the Southwest Pacific imbued

him with a sense of autonomous authority and self-assurance far out of the ordinary for a military man. His staff remained with him and assumed his characteristics and beliefs, without benefit of rotation to other commands and service under other commanders. This experience made MacArthur and his staff bitter and resentful men and caused them to look upon Washington as the enemy in their rear.

This background from World War II of constant strife carried over after the war and caused MacArthur to be critical of almost everyone not under his immediate command. Naturally, it also earned him enemies in high places. By nature MacArthur was an extremely intelligent individual. His intelligence together with a record for being right in virtually all of his important decisions, gained him an almost legendary reputation in the art of warfare, and earned him the title of the most skillful strategist of our century from a host of his admirers and critics. This knack of being right also overlapped into nonmilitary fields. Through skillful manipulation of props and public relations, he wove a colorful and flamboyant personality around himself, carefully preserved by an aloof and autocratic manner, as an able administrator and a courageous and honored soldier. His philosophy was a military application of extreme American nationalism, belief in divine guidance and near-mystical morality.

President Harry S. Truman was a far less complex man than his autocratic general. His outstanding characteristics while president were his extreme sense of loyalty to his immediate subordinates



(sometimes considered his major fault), a keen sense of history, his reverence for the office of chief executive, and moral courage far beyond the ordinary. President Truman had several unsuccessful encounters with MacArthur prior to Korea (although he did not meet him until the Wake Island encounter), the first one being concerned with MacArthur's Philippine policy and support of the one-time Japanese puppet Manuel Roxas. In 1949, President Truman invited MacArthur to return to the United States on two occasions and was rebuffed each time with the excuse that the general could not afford to leave the touchy situation in Japan. During the years of MacArthur's tour as Supreme Commander Allied Powers in Japan, Truman's chief advisers and subordinates were continually in conflict with him in Japan, and generally were unsuccessful. President Truman was pro-military, despite this, and during his administrations he had close and continuing relations with military men, whom he admired. He was responsible for sweeping reforms in the organization of the Armed Forces, he appointed military men to key positions in his administrations, and he had a good opinion of military men in general.

Secretary of Defense George Marshall was an example of Truman's confidence in certain military men. It has been said that Truman regarded Marshall as "the greatest living American," and certainly the positions to which the President appointed General Marshall reflect this sentiment. Marshall knew MacArthur throughout his career, and had little reason to like him. Marshall was Chief of Staff of the Army at the time MacArthur was besieged on Bataan and retained that

position throughout the war. As such, he represented the European-minded JCS MacArthur so resented and was the recipient of much of the official invective MacArthur poured forth to Washington. Marshall, of course, was Secretary of State when the Marshall Plan was announced, and Secretary of Defense when the United States joined NATO. Thus, MacArthur and Marshall were in almost constant conflict, with Marshall holding the upper hand from the time of Pearl Harbor on. As Secretary of State, Marshall's subordinates received very rough treatment indeed from the SCAP. Marshall was the exact opposite of MacArthur in almost every respect for he was selfless, colorless, loyal, global-minded, European-oriented, close-mouthed, well liked by all and a superb wartime Chief of Staff.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson was loyally supported by the President through one of the most difficult periods that an American Secretary of State has ever endured. During his tenure of office he was under fire from all sides and the object of partisan attack. Congress demanded his dismissal as recently as December 1950, for his alleged failures in foreign policy. He too had had prior experience with General MacArthur, dating back to 1945 when, as Under Secretary of State, Acheson had strongly advocated the removal of the Japanese Emperor. MacArthur had countered that proposal and personally vindicated his decision by landing with the vanguard of occupation troops in Japan to meet with the Emperor and negotiate to prevent possible bloodshed after the surrender. From that time forth, Acheson and MacArthur were in constant bitter struggle over

the origin and formulation of occupation policies in Japan. After Acheson became Secretary of State, he made a now-famous speech to the National Press Club in Washington on 12 January 1950, in which he described the United States defense perimeter in the Pacific, excluding both South Korea and Formosa. MacArthur later said that he thought Acheson "was badly advised about the Far East"<sup>7</sup> and invited him to Tokyo in the belief that a trip to the Far East might alter Acheson's views. Acheson declined the visit "saying that the pressure of his duties prevented him from leaving Washington. He did, however, visit Europe eleven times during his stay in office."<sup>8</sup>

The two remaining advisers are important due to their convictions, and not due to any personal controversy or experience with General MacArthur. General Omar N. Bradley, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, represented faithfully the administration's policy of the primacy of Europe and collective security. His military experience was focused in Europe as an Army Group Commander in World War II. Testimony during the MacArthur hearings established the fact that his convictions closely paralleled the administration's policy. He was also known for his scrupulous respect for the civil-military relationship and loyalty to his superiors. During the Senate hearings he was asked to reveal the advice that he gave the President during the conference just prior to MacArthur's dismissal. He refused to tell the committee based on his belief that conversations

---

<sup>7</sup>MacArthur, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.



with the President were privileged. Despite great pressure from the Senators on the committee, they never did learn what was said at that historic moment.

Mr. W. Averell Harriman, as Presidential Special Adviser, played an unofficial but highly important part in formulating President Truman's foreign policies and working in the Executive Branch to coordinate these policies. As the former Ambassador to Moscow, he represented another "Europe-first" man and was of particular value to the President in analyzing the policies and intentions of the Soviet Union.

#### STRATEGY

The differences in strategy between Truman's administration and General MacArthur were far more deeply rooted than the chronology of events leading to MacArthur's dismissal reveal. The basic national policy of the United States since several years after the end of World War II has been firmly based on the containment of the USSR and its satellites, the recognition that the USSR is the enemy, collective security with allies ringing the USSR, and the primacy of Europe. The Truman administrations consistently supported that policy between 1947 and 1952, and subsequent administrations have basically adhered to it. Truman and his advisers saw the war in South Korea as simply the containment of Soviet-Asiatic expansionism while maintaining the ability to defend Europe. The basic philosophy behind the policy of containment is the belief that if communism is

contained long enough, it will lose its militant drive and eventually will rejoin the community of peaceful nations. Thus under this policy, the United States is not seeking to wage a decisive war with the Communists, even the Chinese Communists. Certainly the Truman administration did not wish to become engaged in a major war with the Chinese Communists which it could not hope to wage, and win, if it was simultaneously to continue to deter war in Europe. Truman's strategy called for limited objectives and waging the Korean war with limited means in Korea. Truman believed that extending the war to China would broaden the war with the grave danger of Soviet intervention in Asia and Europe and escalation to nuclear warfare.

MacArthur, for obvious reasons, was Asiatic minded, and oriented specifically to the Far East. In many ways he followed the beliefs of conservative Republicans who are isolationists in regard to Europe, but have a deep and abiding attachment to the Orient and its importance. At any rate, he appealed to Senator Taft and his wing of the GOP. MacArthur in his Senate testimony repeatedly brought out the fact that he knew little of other parts of the world, beyond the general knowledge possessed by any officer. He repeatedly declined to differ with the Administration on NATO, the UN, Europe, or anything else not directly connected with Asia. He stated many times that allies were valuable in the Korean War and that we should encourage their participation on a larger scale, but when pressed he revealed that he thought the United States should fight on in Korea:

Alone, if necessary. If the other nations of the world haven't got enough sense to see where appeasement leads

after the appeasement which led to the Second World War in Europe, if they can't see exactly the road that they are following in Asia, why then we had better protect ourselves and go it alone.<sup>9</sup>

MacArthur believed that the Chinese Communists were straining their limited resources waging the Korean war, that they could be forced to withdraw from the Korean peninsula by an attack on China's internal distributive system and a blockade of Chinese ports:

I believe that the Chinese, the potential of China to wage modern war, is limited. She lacks the industrial base upon which modern war is based.

She is unable herself to turn out an air force or to turn out a navy. She is unable to supply herself with some of the heavier munitions.

I believe that the minute the pressure was placed upon her distributive system, the minute you stop the flow of strategic materials which has been going on so extensively since the Korean War started, that she would be unable to maintain in the field even the armies that she has now.

She, I believe, has the inherent weaknesses for modern war of relying entirely upon ground forces and not having the industrial system even to supply them.

I believe that against the modern scientific methods of the United Nations, the potential of the United Nations, of the United States, if you would have it so, is sufficient to force the Chinese to stop their aggression in Korea.

We have no desire to destroy China, quite the contrary. You know from your own erudite and long experience of the long friendship between the two countries. But we do have a great desire to make her stop her aggressive attacking in Korea.

---

<sup>9</sup>US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Hearings, Military Situation in the Far East, p. 42.



I believe that when you hit her base potential that way she would be forced to stop her aggression in Korea. I believe that under those conditions she would talk a reasonable cease-fire procedure.<sup>10</sup>

Although MacArthur's statement to the Congress implied unlimited means to achieve victory, in fact his strategy called for limited actions and a negotiated withdrawal by the Chinese from Korea:

But once the war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory--not prolonged indecision. In war, indeed, there can be no substitute for victory.<sup>11</sup>

The basic reason for his deliberate insubordination was the high casualty rate and constant attrition to his command. He proposed that he be allowed to strike the enemy's bases in Manchuria, that a naval blockade of China be instituted, and that air interdiction of China's interior lines of communication be undertaken. He further recommended that Chiang Kai-shek's forces be given US support and that they be released for use wherever Chiang saw fit. He believed that the Soviets would not intervene, unless they saw that it was in their best interests, and that China could be brought to the conference table by these limited actions.

President Truman, on the other hand, believed that if MacArthur's recommendations were put into effect, a major war with China would result which would probably turn into a massive ground war, and that the Soviets would probably go to the support of their Chinese allies if the war went badly for them. He was primarily concerned with the

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 3615.

moral and political issue of assisting a free nation in its resistance to Communist aggression.

MacArthur believed that Korea was the right war, in the right place and at the right time to stop Communist dreams of expansion for once and for all. Truman saw this war as one of many continuing actions to contain or force back Communist aggression without taking decisive action which might cause Communist China or the Soviets to believe that their vital national interests were in danger.

#### MILITARY

In addition to differences in strategy and philosophy, and the justifiable charge of insubordination, President Truman might well have relieved MacArthur for military ineffectiveness. General MacArthur, when appointed as the United Nations military commander in Korea, was given total military authority and responsibility in Korea, subject to the directives of the JCS. His intelligence officer has stated that MacArthur was sufficiently informed of the capabilities and intentions of the Chinese Communist People's Army massed along the Yalu River, and was mentally prepared for their attack as early as the first week in November 1950.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Eighth Army had been forced to withdraw some 40 miles from the Yalu on 6 November, due to the attacks of four positively identified Chinese divisions. In the face of all this, MacArthur decided that the best military

---

<sup>12</sup> Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur 1941-1951, p. 350.

course of action to follow was a "reconnaissance in force" to cause the CCPA to commit themselves prematurely. Lacking sufficient troop strength for an effective defense in depth, he believed that his two-pronged attack north would split the overwhelming strength of the Red Chinese. This was a military decision made within the existing political restrictions and based on his estimate of the enemy situation and the capabilities of his own forces. The enemy hit the attacking columns of the widely dispersed Eighth Army and Tenth Corps and drove between the two independent forces for a distance of 40 miles before turning to envelop the rear. The loss of men, materiel, territory and morale by the United Nations forces was severe. If General MacArthur had formed certain assumptions concerning future permission to bomb the Yalu bridges and Manchuria, as well he might have, he was wrong. He gambled and lost, as at Inchon he gambled that the North Koreans would not deduce his intentions, and won. Despite eminent authorities who disagree,<sup>13</sup> General MacArthur's brilliant military reputation was diminished and the Eighth Army and Tenth Corps suffered unnecessary setbacks and losses. Though the President did not relieve MacArthur at that time, he seriously considered doing so.<sup>14</sup> The memory of this mistaken military decision was certainly present in the little circle of decisionmakers on 10 April 1951.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>R. E. Dupuy, Military Heritage of America, pp. 795-799.

<sup>14</sup>Truman, op. cit., p. 384.

<sup>15</sup>In some publications writers make much of the fact that MacArthur failed to predict the Chinese intervention, and that he told President Truman at the Wake Island conference that they would not intervene. I have chosen to believe MacArthur's intelligence officer, guided by Truman's statement in his biography that he completely forgave MacArthur for what he deemed a perfectly human mistake that could happen to anyone who attempted to predict the future.



## POLITICAL

The political side of the picture is one of considerable pertinency. Public opinion was a major factor in the formulation of the decision. MacArthur was tremendously popular with the American public as a highly successful military figure. Undoubtedly President Truman had weighed this factor when he appointed him as Commander in Chief of the United Nations forces, to reassure the public that the Korean War was in the most capable military hands available. By April 1951, Truman's Administration was under terrific public pressure with accusations of corruption in government, faulty foreign policy, and blundering subordinates. Popular distaste was growing for the bloody war in far-off Korea. MacArthur's policies appealed to American impatience, desire for action and revenge for lost prestige. Truman's policies were decried as "appeasement" or worse. Inevitably, partisan politics entered the issue, with many right-wing Republicans, led by Senator Taft, articulate in MacArthur's support. The political decision to enter the Korean War, though initially receiving bipartisan support, had become more and more a partisan issue. In essence, the isolationists were attacking the adherents of collective security and the United Nations. By January 1951, in the first "Great Debate," even the constitutional right of President Truman to commit troops to Europe was challenged by Senator Taft. The features of MacArthur's philosophy strongly attracted isolationist Republicans. MacArthur thus was involved in partisan politics, and Truman, the expert politician, certainly saw it in that

light. The fact that it was MacArthur's letter to the minority leader that finally tipped the balance and caused Truman to take decisive action, is not a historical accident.

Nor was this the first time that Truman and MacArthur had been on opposite sides of a political fence. In the 1948 presidential campaign, General MacArthur made known his availability as a candidate, if drafted, though at that time he did not engage in any political action beyond that simple statement. Certainly, however, the presence of the considerable figure of General MacArthur on the political scene in 1948 as an announced opponent of President Harry S. Truman, cannot be discounted lightly in the decision which was made three years later.

Politically speaking, President Truman could conclude by April 1951, that the dismissal of General MacArthur offered more to the positive side of the balance than the negative. It would serve to remove a dissenting voice from a position of authority and responsibility, would consolidate the administration and party firmly behind its announced policies on the Korean War, and would show the world that President Truman was not the civilian dupe of his military commander.

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The issues in the decision touched vital phases of United States foreign policy. Mr. Truman's Administration was committed to: (1) a policy of collectivism and mutual security as outlined in the Charter for the United Nations; (2) a global strategy of resistance

to Communist aggression wherever it appeared; (3) a recognition of the primacy of Europe as the area of principal importance to the nations of the Free World; and (4) limiting the Korean War to prevent its spread to global proportions, without appeasing the aggressors. The relevant corollaries of these policies are: (1) the importance of allies and their views; (2) the need for means of containment on a worldwide scale, as opposed to concentration on one area; and (3) the recognition of negotiated peace in lieu of total victory as an acceptable end for war.

At the time President Truman made his decision to dismiss General MacArthur, the United Nations and all that it represented were under severe attack by prominent American critics. Though the UN took rapid and unprecedented action in June 1950, the strain of meeting the new aggression of Red China had undone much of the good work to its credit. In the weeks following the Chinese intervention, Red China was not branded as an "aggressor," there were no economic sanctions against Red China (indeed, many member nations with troops in Korea continued to trade with the "enemy"), and there was no increase in UN forces in Korea. Worse, many nations indicated their willingness to pay the price demanded by Red China for calling off her aggression. The Security Council was ineffective as the ruling body of the United Nations due to the veto power of the Soviet Union (fortunately absent in boycott of the UN in June 1950). The General Assembly had attempted to fill the gap left by the Security Council and passed the Acheson Plan, though it too was impotent due to the



lack of unanimity among the 54 non-Communist nations represented. Britain and others wanted to seat Red China, a proposal totally unacceptable to the United States. Though Truman's Administration was continuing its efforts to achieve its views in the United Nations, those outside the administration were not so patient. Joseph P. Kennedy, former Ambassador to England, stated in December 1950 that the United Nations was a failure and the United States should withdraw from its overseas commitments in Europe and Korea. Herbert Hoover, the same month, picked the argument up and carried it to its logical conclusion when he said that the US should retire behind the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and not commit another man or dollar until the nations of Western Europe helped themselves. There were a number of articles in leading periodicals and newspapers analyzing the various reasons for the United Nations lack of effectiveness, and the American public was rapidly becoming disenchanted with the international organization they were pledged to support. The administration was attacked in Congress in January 1951, and the question of regional pacts within the UN framework was reexamined. Though debated as a constitutional question, the fireworks were politically possible only in the face of growing public discontent with the administration's foreign policies.

Aside from the Communist nations, the greatest challenge to the United Nations and its policies came from the Commander in Chief of the UN forces and his backers in the American Congress. MacArthur's public statements against the restrictions imposed on his military

authority by the UN, alarmed the member nations. In addition, he snubbed and thwarted the United Nations (and President Truman) when he made the peace proposal to the Chinese Communists without prior knowledge or sanction of the UN, and in clear opposition to the announced policies of that organization. His veiled threat to the Chinese that the conflict would be extended to include Chinese territory was directly contrary to the spirit and the letter of his instructions. The press in allied nations, particularly England, was loud in condemnation of the American general. Leading European statesmen publicly expressed their fears of the "dangerous" policies MacArthur was advocating, and pressure was placed on President Truman.

The primacy of Europe and the importance of our European allies is a basic foreign policy of the United States. There are many reasons for this concept, not the least of which is the fact that our major allies are Europeans, not Asiatics. In return for the support of the European powers in Korea, the United States made many concessions to their policies in the Far East. England depends heavily on overseas trade and the Orient is her traditional trading ground. To a lesser extent, the same is true of other free European powers. General MacArthur's visit to Formosa seriously alarmed Europe, for it appeared that the United States was reopening old liaisons with its friends the Nationalist Chinese. The blockade of the China coast, advocated by General MacArthur, and the use of Chinese Nationalist troops against the China mainland would seriously have endangered the China trade and opened the possibility of

entangling our European allies in a long drawnout ground war on the China mainland--anathema to all European statesmen and military men. British Prime Minister Clement Atlee flew to see President Truman in December 1950, for reassurance on our China policy. Truman gave Europe the pledges they wanted to hear. He restated his belief that Russia, not China, was the principal enemy and his determination not to become so deeply involved in Asia that Europe would be lost by default. He said that the US would not voluntarily desert its friends the South Koreans, and that the only acceptable conclusion to the Korean War appeared to be a negotiated cease-fire with the Chinese. If the Chinese refused to negotiate, the UN must declare them an aggressor and "mobilize such political and economic measures as are available to bring pressure upon Peiping and to affirm the determination of the United Nations not to accept an aggression."<sup>16</sup>

Thus it is clear that General MacArthur was a victim of his failure to adhere to the basic foreign policy of the United States. It is possible that he never had the full rationale of the United States policy explained to him. Only in the hearings following his dismissal did President Truman and all his principal advisers clearly and unequivocally state "our aim is to avoid the spread of the conflict." The policy of the administration was to demonstrate the willingness of the Free World to meet the aggressions of communism, with armed force if necessary, to limit the aggression, and to

---

<sup>16</sup>Truman, op. cit., p. 400.




prevent the start of a worldwide atomic war due to any action that we might take. To General MacArthur, anything less than total victory was appeasement and a waste of human life. General MacArthur represented the principal opponent to President Truman's policy. As such, he could not be left in command at the risk of overrunning policy objectives through the actions of one man.

### CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important conclusion which can be drawn from study of MacArthur's dismissal, is the interrelationship of our strategy and our basic foreign policy. Today the "hawks" are saying that due to the Sino-Soviet rift, Communist China is the principal enemy, and the Soviet Union is at least implicitly our ally. The "doves" wish to avoid confrontation with the Chinese, not due to our inability to defeat the Chinese, but because it detracts from our basic foreign policy of containing the USSR. Until there is a basic and fundamental change in the foreign policy of the United States, the strategist of today must constantly assess strategy to determine how well it supports all of the foreign policies, not just the immediate problem at hand, such as South Vietnam. We are self-constrained to limit our military actions to those which will cause the enemy to draw back from his aggressions without ever becoming seriously in doubt of the continued existence of his vital national interests. General MacArthur failed to adhere to this belief, and was removed. Every military man should benefit from his

example and understand the deep roots of the existing strategy and the reasons for its fundamental validity.

  
CHARLES M. SIMPSON III  
Lt Col, Infantry

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Appleman, Roy Edgar. South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu. Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept of the Army, 1961. (DS919 U5 v.1)  
  
(Official Army version of the Korean War from June-November 1950.)
2. Bundy, McGeorge. The Pattern of Responsibility. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952. (JX1416)  
  
(Autobiography edited from the records of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, covering US foreign relations from 1945 to 1952. Contains a good account of the differences between MacArthur and the Administration.)
3. Dean, Vera M. Foreign Policy Without Fear. New York: McGraw-Hill Co., Inc., 1953. (JX1416 D42)  
  
(Of particular interest to this subject is the account of the United Nations and the US relationship to the other member nations.)
4. Dupuy, R. E., and Dupuy, T. N. Military Heritage of America. Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Military Science and Tactics, Harvard University, 1954. (E181 D8)  
  
(A military history written by two army officers. Consistently favorable to MacArthur.)
5. Eyre, James K., Jr. The Roosevelt-MacArthur Conflict. Chambersburg, Pa.: The Craft Press, 1950. (Not in Post libraries)  
  
(Of particular interest to this subject is the section showing the early Truman-MacArthur dispute over the liberation of Manual Roxas, which started their relationship off on a bad foot.)
6. Hunt, Frazier. The Untold Story of Douglas MacArthur. New York: Devlin Adair Co., 1954. (E745 M3H8)  
  
(Hunt makes the Acheson-MacArthur conflict a major issue in his quickie biography. Though carried to the realm of the ridiculous, it reflects to some degree MacArthur's resentment of Acheson. "The bitter hatred and envy that the leftist groups around the White House, along with certain individuals in the Pentagon and State Department, had for MacArthur" is



the theme of later chapters and he consistently links Acheson with the forces that undermined and ultimately brought down the general.)

7. Latourette, Kenneth S. The American Record in the Far East 1945-1951. New York: MacMillan Co., 1952. (JX1428.1 F3L3)

(Historical account by a distinguished American expert on the Far East, extending an earlier scholarly work.)

8. MacArthur, Douglas. Reminiscences. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964. (E745 M3A3)

(MacArthur's autobiography written long after the fact and of principal value as an account of what MacArthur believed or wished to believe happened, rather than an accurate historical record. Unfortunately, the only autobiographical account.)

9. Middleton, Harry J. The Compact History of the Korean War. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1965. (Special Services Library)

(An excellent narrative account of the Korean War very recently published.)

10. Payne, Robert. The Marshall Story. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951. (E745 M37P3)

(Until the definitive biography of Marshall is made public some years in the future, this is about the best single account of Marshall. Payne characterizes the MacArthur hearings as being in reality between Marshall and MacArthur who represented two distinct strains of American policy.)

11. Poats, Rutherford M. Decision in Korea. New York: McBride Co., 1954. (DS918 P6)

12. Rovere, Richard H., and Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. The General and the President. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951. (E745 M3R6)

(A quickie book produced to cash in on public interest in the MacArthur hearings, but a surprisingly good book. It is the most interesting and well written book on the subject available.)

13. Sapin, Burton M., and Snyder, Richard C. The Role of the Military in American Foreign Policy. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1954. (JX1416 S25)

(A short 77 page pamphlet which relies heavily on historical example to show the role of the US military in the formulation and execution of US foreign policy.)

14. Spanier, John W. The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1959. (E745 M3S65)

(An excellent book which attempts to derive the basic problems raised: first, the ability of an administration to preserve civilian control when the soldier can rely upon one or two pillars of support; and second, a public whose philosophical and temperamental disposition does not incline it toward fighting limited wars.)

15. Truman, Harry S. Years of Trial and Hope. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1956. (E814 T75 v.2)

(President Truman's fine autobiography is of great value in understanding the issues in this conflict.)

16. US Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services. Military Situation in the Far East. Hearings. 82d Congress, 1st Session. Washington: US GPO, 1951. (DS918 U55)

(Massive transcript of the MacArthur hearings.)

17. White, William S. The Taft Story. New York: Harper & Bros., 1954. (E748 T3W5)

(Journalist White's biography of the late Senator Taft. Excellent description of right-wing Republican philosophy toward Asia.)

18. Willoughby, Charles A. (Maj. Gen.), and Chamberlain, John. MacArthur 1941-1951. New York: McGraw-Hill Co., Inc., 1954. (E745 M3W5)

(Highly pro-MacArthur partisan account.)