

A NEW LOOK AT THE KOREAN WAR

By John H. Kim

Starting this June 2000 and continuing for the next three years, the Pentagon will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War with special commemorative events in the U.S. and South Korea, spending seven million dollars of our tax money. At the same time, the Pentagon was forced to reinvestigate the AP news report concerning the U.S. killing of several hundreds of South Korean civilians at Nogun-ri in late July 1950, putting out a misleading and evasive report in January 2001. The Korean victims of the Nogun-ri massacre have called the report a "white-wash."

It's about time that we, American people, take another look at the "Forgotten War" (a.k.a. "Unknown War") and try to understand the real nature of the War so that we could do something about to bring the War to an end. Many Americans erroneously believe that the war was over long time ago. But, in fact, the War is still going on there in less obvious ways: military build-ups, economic sanctions, propaganda war, nuclear crisis, etc. The sad truth is that the U.S. government has been fighting the longest, most ferocious, unauthorized war in its history.

Almost a half century after the Armistice, the U.S. still maintains about 37,000 U.S. troops spread over dozens of military bases in South Korea today. What we have in Korea is merely a precarious cease-fire agreement which can turn into another war at any time. We came very close to re-ignite the war in 1994 and 1999. How long are we going to stay in Korea, and at what cost? When are we going to bring our boys home at last? How long are we going to ignore our responsibility for the tragic division of Korea and the Korean War?

Division of Korea

For a full understanding of Korean War, it is necessary to understand something about the past history of the U.S. policy toward Korea prior to the outbreak of the War. Korea first emerged as a unified country in 668 A.D. when Silla annexed Paekche and Koguryo, ending the Three Kingdoms period. The U.S. first established its diplomatic relation with Korea when it signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the Kingdom of Chosin in 1882. However, the U.S. government soon proved to be not a real friend to the Korean people when Japan attempted to colonize Korea. Instead of restraining Japan's imperialist ambition, President Theodore Roosevelt entered into a secret deal with Japan in 1905 (a.k.a. "Taft-Katsura Memorandum") by recognizing Japan's domination of Korea in return for Japan's recognition of U.S. hegemony in the Philippines.

This tendency of American government to betray Korean people's interests repeats itself again at the end of the World War II. In order to stop the downward march of the Soviet Union troops and secure U.S. influence on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee drew an arbitrary line across the 38th Parallel in Korea, asking the Soviet forces to stop at the 38th Parallel. Although the American forces were in Okinawa at the time, the Soviet Union somehow accepted the American demand meekly, thus paving the way for the establishment of two separate governments in Korea as the Cold war intensified.

In addition to the tragic division of Korea, the U.S. also refused to recognize the Korean People's Republic (KPR), a nationwide, progressive, people's government which had been organized by the anti-Japanese nationalist Koreans before the arrival of American troops in South Korea in September 1945. Instead of cooperating with KPR, the U.S. created a military government in its zone of occupation,

outlawing the KPR and the popular People's Committees under the control of KPR. This is the key to a full understanding of the origin of the Korean War.

Outbreak of the Korean War

The official American history is that the Korean War started on June 25, 1950 when the North Korean forces suddenly attacked the South under Stalin's order. This is a gross misrepresentation of the origin of the War. For one thing certain now, according to the Russian documents declassified, is that Stalin did not order Kim Il Sung to start the War. On the contrary, it was Kim Il Sung who sought permission to attack the South in case the North was attacked. The truth is that the Korean War really started in 1945 when the U.S. suppressed the KPR government and imposed its military rule in the southern part of Korea.

During the American Military Government (1945-1948) and the period from the establishment of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the South in August 1948 to the full-scale war in June 1950, the U.S. military and the fascist Rhee regime, allied with pro-Japanese Koreans, either imprisoned or killed hundreds of thousands of Korean nationalists and socialists in order to establish a separate, pro-American government in the South. This savage repression resulted in bloody armed struggle by the angry Korean peasants, workers, students, and soldiers all over southern Korea. Major armed uprisings took place in Daegu, Cheju Island, Yosu, and Suncheon. In Cheju island alone from 1948 to 1949, more than 30,000 Koreans were killed, out of 300,000 population, by the South Korean police/military forces and right-wing youth gangs under the direction of the American military officers.

In addition to the widespread guerrilla warfare in the South, major battles also broke out between the North Korean (DPRK) and South Korean (ROK) armies along the 38th parallel line in 1949. The first major battle, initiated by the ROK troops near the border city of Kaesong, took place on May 4, 1949, lasting four days with hundreds of dead soldiers. The fighting also occurred in June 1949 in the Ongjin peninsula, the same area where the official Korean War would "begin" one year later. Then another major battle also broke out in August 1949.

Thus, when the armed clash broke out in June 1950, it was more or less a continuation of the past conflicts. It was certainly not a surprise attack. The anti-communist dictator Syngman Rhee was openly preaching a military unification of Korea by attacking the North. At the same time, the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung was also preparing for a military counter-attack against the South when Rhee attacked. The U.S. was fully aware of the tense situation and took advantage of it for justifying its rapid, gigantic military build-up plan which was first presented in April 1950 as National Security Council resolution #68. When the fighting started on June 25, each side accused the other for starting the war. Under this murky picture, President Truman nevertheless labeled the civil war as a naked aggression of communist world against a free nation, and intervened in the war under the UN flag to avoid an official declaration of war in the U.S. Congress. Truman characterized his decision as a "police action," setting a bad precedent for other U.S. military adventures, including the Vietnam War later.

To American people of today, it doesn't matter much as to which side started the American Civil War. The important thing we remember is that the war was fought over the issue of slavery and to preserve the national union. Likewise, the Korean War was mainly a civil war of Korean people over the question of national reunification which turned into an international military conflict with the intervention of outside forces in the war. Prof. Bruce Cumings of the University of Chicago, who is the author of the two monumental book on the *Origins of the Korean War*, sums it up the best:

"The Nogun massacre can help Americans understand what this 'forgotten war' was really about. It was a civil and unconventional war that had its origins long before June 1950, and the official repositories of

historical truth in Washington and Seoul have been lying about its basic nature for half a century." (Bruce Cumings, "Korean My Lai," *the Nation*, Oct. 25, 1999)

U.S. Atrocities

The Associated Press' stunning report in September 1999 on the massacre of several hundred Korean civilians by U.S. soldiers in late July 1950 near Nogun-ri was a historical turning point in revealing the true history of the Korean War. It is the beginning of the unmasking of the official American lies. And it is just the tip of an iceberg. In addition to the crime of aggression, the United States committed numerous war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, in violation of the international humanitarian law, during the Korean War. They can be summarized as follows:

1) Massacre of Korean Civilians

The U.S. Army, Air Force and Navy were directly involved in the killing of about three million Korean civilians—both South Koreans and North Koreans—at many locations throughout Korea, including Masan, Sachon, Tanyang, Iksan, Changyong, Wegwan, Ducksung, Sinchun, Wonsan, Pyongyang, etc. Several hundreds of civilians refugees were blown apart when the U.S. Army blew up Wegwan and Ducksung bridges in S. Korea. North Korean government claims that more than 35,000 N. Korean civilians were massacred at Sinchun county during the U.S. military occupation of the area near Pyongyang. One report indicates that the 7th Regiment of the 1st Cav. Division, which traces its infamous history all the way back to General Custer, was the same unit which was involved both in Nogun-ri and Sinchun massacres. Among the several branches of the U.S. military, the U.S. Air Force was probably more responsible than any other branches for the huge number of civilian killings because of its indiscriminate shootings and bombings of civilian refugees, villages, towns, and cities in violation of Hague Conventions. At the end of the war, almost all the North Korean cities were leveled to the ground by carpet bombing, including Pyonyang, Najin, Shiniju, Wonsan, Hungnam, etc. It is reported that the U.S. dropped some 650,000 tons of bombs, including 43,000 tons of napalm bombs, during the Korean War. (See Cumings, *the Origins of the Korean War, Vol. II*; Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*; and *The Korea Herald*, 10/9/1999)

2) Destruction of Economic Sites

The first air bombing of North Korean dam occurred in May 1951 when the U.S. Navy planes torpedoed the gates of Hwachon dam. In April 1952, Air Force Brigadier General Jacob E. Smart's staff drew up plans for strikes against the N. Korean power plants to destroy the economy of N. Korea. Gen. Matthew Ridgway and later Gen. Mark Clark endorsed these "air pressure" strikes. On June 23, 1952, Navy dive bombers from four carriers, covered by Air Force Sabres, attacked the Sui-ho hydroelectric power generation facilities located near Yalu River. Other power generation facilities were also bombed the next day. These attacks on power plants reduced N. Korea's power generation capacity by 90%. At Smart's suggestion, Air Force-Navy planes also struck N. Korea's military plants and oil refinery sites. U.S. also destroyed five irrigation dams 27 miles north of Pyongyang in May 1953 through air bombing. The latter was intended to deny food to N. Koreans. (See Stanley Sandler, Editor, *The Korean War: An encyclopedia*, 1995, pp.231-237.)

3) Rape/Murder of Korean Women and Girls by U.S. Soldiers

Numerous incidents of individual and group rapes of Korean girls and women have been reported both in South and North Korea during the War. This problem still persists in South Korea even today due to the continuing presence of some 37,000 U.S. troops there. (See Cumings, *the Origins of the Korean War, Vol. II* & International Association of Democratic Lawyers, *Report on U.S. Crimes in Korea*, 1952)

4) Chemical/Biological Warfare

North Korea reported that American war planes dropped chemical bombs on the North Korean military positions as well as on villages, resulting hundreds of North Korean civilian deaths. U.S. also experimented with biological weapons in the North, with the active assistance of the Japanese war criminals who were involved in human experiments during WWII. (See Stephen Endicott, *The U.S. & Biological Warfare: Secrets From Early Cold War and Korea*)

5) Mistreatment of POWs

Thousands of North Korean and Chinese POWs died due to deliberate shooting and torture by the prison guards, starvation and medical experiments. General Crawford Sam's so-called Bubonic plague ship, Landing Craft No. 1091, was stationed in the Koje island where the majority of the POWs was kept. The ship is suspected to have used the POWs to work out certain aspects of germ warfare. (See Hugh Deane, *The Korean War*)

6) Threatening Use of Atomic Bombs

On July 9, 1950, MacArthur sent a "hot message" to Joint Chiefs of staff (JCS) suggesting use of atomic bombs. On November 30, 1950, Truman himself threatened use of weapons of mass destruction, including atomic bomb, at a news conference. In December 1950 MacArthur asked for commander's discretion to use nuclear bombs requesting 34 of them. He also proposed spreading a belt of radioactive cobalt across the neck of Manchuria. In June 1951, JCS considered use of atomic weapons in tactical battlefield circumstances. Simulated atomic bombing runs were conducted by B-29s from Okinawa (Operation Hudson Harbor). In Sept. and Oct. of 1951, Truman approved this experiment. In April 1953, president Eisenhower approved a contingency plan-NSC147- providing for atomic attacks on Communist air bases and lines of communication and transportation to force acceptance of Armistice agreement. (See Cumings, *Korea's Place Under the Sun*)

7) Assassination Attempt on Kim, Il Sung

The American CIA sent a Cherokee Indian American code-named "Buffalo" to North Korea during the War to kill the North Korean leader Kim, Il Sung with promise of a large sum of money in case of success. He obviously failed in his mission.(See Goulden, *Korea*)

8) Engaging in International Piracy and Murder

In another secret operation code-named "TP-Stole" in 1951, the CIA intercepted in international water a Norwegian ship, loaded with medical supplies and volunteer doctors and nurses, which was heading toward Manchuria. The medical supplies were taken away by the Taiwan Coast Guard personnel disguised as pirates and the medical personnel were probably killed off. The medical supplies and personnel had been provided by the Indian government as a humanitarian aid for the wounded Chinese soldiers. This operation was directed by Hans Tofte, the CIA chief in the Far East under direct order from the CIA headquarters. (See Joseph C. Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War*)

9) Conspiracy to Remove/Murder Syngman Rhee

As the South Korean President became more dictatorial and sometimes refused the U.S. order, the Truman administration authorized General Clark, the U.S. Commander in Korea, to take contingency measures ("Operation Everready") to arrest Rhee and install a S. Korean general, who would be more

obedient to the U.S. order, as new head of a military government. The plan seems to have authorized killing of Rhee if necessary. (See Goulden, *Korea*; Cumings, *the Origins of the Korean War, Vol. II*)

10) Mass Murder of Korean Political Prisoners

At the outbreak of the War, the S. Korean regime had some 100,000 political prisoners in jails. As the S. Korean military retreated to the south, the Rhee regime apparently issued orders, with possible approval of the U.S. advisers, to kill all the political prisoners. These prisoners were taken to the fields, mountains or seas and executed by the S. Korean police or military police, often in the presence of U.S. military advisers or intelligence agents who took pictures of the mass killings. Lt. Col. Bob E. Edwards, the military attaché to the U.S. Embassy in South Korea, had sent secret reports of these executions with photos to the Joint Chief of Staff. However, the official U.S. Army's history of the Korean War incredibly blamed the North Korean troops for this horrendous mass murder. In addition, hundreds of thousands of North Korean civilians who were followers or suspected supporters of the North Korean government were arrested and executed in cold blood during the U.S. occupation of North Korea in October and November 1950. (See *The New York Times*, 4/21/2000 ; Roy Appleman, *South to Naktong, North to Yalu*, office of the Chief Military History, 1961; Cumings)

While the Pentagon was forced to reinvestigate the Nogun-ri massacre, the Clinton administration refused to investigate other war crimes or crimes against humanity that happened in Korea. In order to prevent any future happenings of similar atrocities, the U.S. Congress should establish a special commission to investigate the entire conduct of the U.S. officials during the Korean War. If the Congress does not do so, then it is incumbent upon the United Nations and American people to establish such a commission of inquiry. After all, these massacres were carried out in the name and under the authority of the United Nations and the U.S. In addition, in accordance with the result of the investigation, the gross sufferings of the victims of the atrocities should be fully redressed, including prosecution of those responsible for the atrocities and fair compensation to the victims.

Developments Since the Armistice Agreement

The bloody fighting which raged for more than three years finally stopped with an armistice agreement on July 27, 1953. It was signed by the U.S., North Korea and China, but not South Korea due to a strong opposition of the former dictator Syngman Rhee. Several million people are believed to have died during the War, including some two million N. Korean civilians and one million S. Korean civilians. Out of some 5.7 million American G.I.s who had served in the Korean War, about 54,000 American soldiers died in combat or for other causes. North Korea is believed to have lost more than 20 percent of its prewar population with a total destruction of its cities and towns. The cease-fire line, drawn along the actual fighting front, resulted in more or less the same division of the country along the 38th parallel. This artificial, cruel division of the homogeneous people, with some ten million victims of separated families, has been a continuing source of tensions and human sufferings.

Although the Armistice agreement provided that an international conference be held within three months of signing the armistice "to settle through negotiation settlement of the Korean question, etc.," the U.S. was more anxious to conclude a mutual defense treaty with S. Korea. This defense treaty, signed on Oct. 1, 1953, is indefinite in duration and grants free military bases to the U.S. military in S. Korea.

One important, enduring consequence of the War has been the U.S. military's control over the South Korean military. It is alleged that Rhee gave the command authority of the S. Korean Armed Forces to Gen. MacArthur in July 1950. The legality of this action is in question. In any case, this subservient relationship between the U.S. and South Korea has continued after the War. To deflect the growing criticism of South Koreans over this neo-colonial arrangement, the two governments created a "Combined

Forces Command" over the S. Korean and U.S. military forces in 1978. Up until late 1994, this meant the commander of the U.S. Forces/Korea had operational control of S. Korean Armed Forces even in peacetime (now, it's only in wartime). Under this new arrangement, the U.S. Commander in S. Korea wears three hats as the Chief Commander of the UN Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces/Korea. It is to be noted that, under this bizarre military arrangement, the U.S. will automatically get involved in another war if the Korean War is re-ignited, without any declaration of war by the U.S. Congress.

In 1958 the Chinese troops withdrew from North Korea. Instead of reciprocating the Chinese move, the U.S. strengthened its military power in South Korea by bringing in tactical nuclear weapons there in clear violation of the Armistice agreement. This dangerous step probably forced North Korea into developing its own nuclear weapons which subsequently resulted in the deadly nuclear crisis with the U.S. in 1994.

Through the good intervention of the former President Carter, the U.S. and DPRK was able to reach the '94 Framework Agreement which committed the U.S. to a normalization of trade and diplomatic relations with North Korea. However, progress has been painfully slow on the part of the U.S. in lifting the longest economic sanctions against another state which was first imposed in 1950. The U.S. is now raising additional demands such as a freeze on North Korea's long-range missile development and export before lifting its economic sanctions fully. Meanwhile, mainland China and Russia have established their diplomatic relations with South Korea. Both Koreas joined the United Nations in 1991, and the North Korea has established normal diplomatic relations with all Western countries except the U.S. and France by June 2001.

Considering the current food energy crisis in North Korea for the past several years, it is quite troublesome and incomprehensible that the U.S. government has largely kept its economic sanctions against North Korea, while providing some food assistance on the other hand. Although Clinton announced the lifting of economic sanctions on North Korea in September 1999, his administration did not issue any implementing regulations until June 19, 2000. Even under the new regulations, any trade activities between the U.S. and North Korea still require prior license and approval of the U.S. government. Thus, U.S. economic sanction on North Korea is very much alive today. This proves that the real objective of the U.S. administrations has been to gain time and wait for the collapse of the North Korean government. But this policy is full of dangers because it will end up in re-igniting the Korean War with more terrible consequences for both Korean and American people. President Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea, who has been pursuing a "sunshine policy" toward North Korea for some time, is clearly opposed to such a dangerous hard-line policy. His liberal, open policy toward the North finally brought about the historical summit between the two leaders of Korea—Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jong Il—in Pyongyang, June 13-15, 2000.

Conclusion

The changed international environment in the post-Cold War era, improved relations between the two Koreas through the historic summit meeting between the two Korean leaders of South and North Korea in June 2000, and the current advantage of South Korea's economic and military strength over North Korea call forth a new U.S. policy toward Korea. Today South Korea's annual military budget of about \$15 billion is several times greater than that of the North's. In addition, South Korea's population is twice that of the North's, and its GNP is over 20 times greater. However, the Pentagon is still mired in the Cold War mentality, claiming that the U.S. military still needs to be stationed in South Korea to guard against the alleged North Korean military threat. Furthermore, the American military-industrial complex wants to continue the Korean War by putting North Korea on the list of terrorist countries and maintaining some

37,000 troops in South Korea today—wasting about \$25 billion each year in overall costs maintaining the outdated military commitment in the Far East.

It is high time for the U.S. to recognize its heavy responsibility for the division of Korea and the terrible destruction and killing of several millions of Korean civilians in the tragic War. It's about time that the U.S. government offers a sincere apology to the Korean people, seek a permanent peace settlement in Korea, and normalize its economic and diplomatic relations with North Korea fully, discarding the Combined Forces Command, and starting a gradual withdrawal of our troops from South Korea. Such a peace settlement at this time, whether in the form of a peace treaty or other agreement, will be highly beneficial not only to both Koreas but also to the United States since the U.S. wouldn't have to proceed with the building of the expensive "star wars" national missile defense system, which may cost more than \$300 billion. Furthermore, the U.S. can save some \$25 billions annually by withdrawing the U.S. troops from South Korea and Japan.

Under this new win-win policy, we can really help the Koreans to achieve an independent, peaceful reunification of Korea and bring about a new era of peace, prosperity and friendly cooperation in the Far East. Unfortunately, the Bush administration is escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula by accusing North Korea as an "axis of evil" and contemplating a pre-emptive strike against North Korea. At this dangerous time of an indefinite "war on terrorism" that may easily be extended to Korea, it is all the more important for concerned American people, especially veterans working for peace and reconciliation, start raising their voices in demanding a final end to the Korean War and a new policy toward Korea.

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