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The Korean War and the DMZ

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Introduction

6th August 1945. *Little Boy* is dropped on the city of Hiroshima causing on impact the death of about 70 000 people. Three days after, on the 9th, another atomic bomb, *Fat Boy*, bursts on the city of Nagasaki killing around 40 000 civilians. In this way the United States have shown to the world the destructive force of a devastating new weapon; these were the only two atomic bombs ever used for military purpose, and ever since their first and last employment the world has changed as it realized that the nuclear threat is real and that it could lead to the collapse of the world. This awareness has led to the establishment, on October 24th 1945 in San Francisco, of the Organization of the United Nations, an international organization born purposely to avoid the repeating of further world conflicts and to promote cooperation between states to a global level. ONU has the aim of maintaining and spreading peace, promoting human rights, protecting the environment and providing humanitarian aid in the case of natural calamities or armed conflict.

Nobody, after the end of World War II, could have imagined that the world would have found itself unaware involved in a period of constant stress which was defined by the journalist Walter Lippmann in 1947 as the “Cold War”. A world divided in two opposite and contrary blocks, each of which led and represented by one of the two superpowers which, since the years twenty, already dethroned the old european powers from the role of leaders at a global level. On one side the United States, allied with the western powers and the countries members of NATO, representing an ideology based on free markets, private property, democracy and freedom of expression; on the other side the Soviet Union, allied with the countries that signed the Warsaw Pact in 1955 and other countries, symbol of communism and a society based on the marxist-leninist doctrine. Luckily a direct clash between the two leading countries never occurred, even if there were times of extremely high tension when the outbreak of a war was avoided by a breath, which could have involved all parts concerned. During the years of the cold war, particularly in the very first years, a colossal rearmament took place which led to a balance of power described as balance of terror. So as to better understand this concept it is well to realize the significance of the term deterrence, in other words, as Kubrick describes it in his movie *Dr Strangelove or: how I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb*, the art of causing in the eventual enemy the dread of attacking. The USA and the Soviet Union filled their arsenals to the brim so as to fling the following message: if you attack me we will destroy ourselves reciprocally.

The Korean War, which burst out in 1950, took exactly place under this atmosphere, and it is the first case of an armed conflict between the two blocks since the end of the second world war. Before the breakout of the conflict, the two super powers were both reluctant to start and take part in another war, but, for a series of reasons that will be analyzed in the first chapter, they found themselves both involved in this quarrel which led, according to certain sources, to the death of over four million people. It was North Korea who invaded South Korea crossing the 38th parallel, owing to the always more evident impossibility of reaching, during 1949, an agreement to unify the two countries. North Korea's aim was the unification of the entire peninsula so as to establish a communist government, and that is the reason why from 1950 it was backed by an army of about 260 000 Chinese volunteers;

the americans, who had driven back the north korean offensive and occupied vast territories of the north, initially underestimated the chinese intervention which led to the reconquest of the occupied territories and consequently brought to a second overstep of the official border of the 38th parallel. The situation was settled only in July of 1951, when a period of unstable stall was reached, consisting in a series of repeated attacks and counterattacks, a real and true war of position which recalled the Great War. In October at Panmunjeom, a place sited in the demilitarized zone(DMZ) agreed between the two parts, the negotiations started for the signing of an armistice which was to take place only in July 1953. The negotiations were blocked chiefly because they could not reach an agreement for an exchange of prisoners of war. Talks were stopped various times and again resumed, and during this period western allied forces kept on bombing cities, airports, bridges and dams in the north. The signature of the agreement about the armistice took place on 27th July 1953 notwithstanding that the president of South Korea Syngman Ree wished to carry on the conflict so as to reunify the entire peninsula in a developed democracy. In February of the following year the Conference of Geneva starts to discuss a peaceful solution of the conflicts in eastern Asia, but it will end without any agreement having been reached. Therefore the Korean War ended up with a disproportionate and useless loss of lives and wounded inasmuch fundamentally from the geopolitical point of view, no change occurred between the start and the end of the clashes. On the other hand the Korean War had repercussions at a global level and caused the division, which was emerging in the world between communism and the western world, to become more clearcut. The most important result of the end of the war was the creation of the DMZ, namely the demilitarized korean zone which acts as a buffer zone between the two Koreas. The borderline between the two countries runs along this demilitarized strip of land, 4 km wide and 248 km long, which withstanding the name is the most militarized zone on earth. In fact this area has been the stage for several incidents and raids from the part of the North, in spite of the fact that the government itself never acknowledged them, especially the one which was named the conflict of the Korean DMZ, particularly violent between 1966 and 1969. This essay has as its aim the explanation of the reason for which the korean conflict never attained a peaceful agreement between the parties concerned, first of all analyzing the war of 1950-53 in the first chapter and subsequently concentrating on the events regarding the DMZ and eventually understanding how the relations between the two countries have evolved until nowadays.

Chapter 1: The Korean War

The Korean Division

When considering the course of the war in Korea 1950-1953 it is interesting to take note of some aspects of the preceding history of this country, since they can give a certain enlightenment on the origins of the conflict. For many centuries Korea had been under the rule of the Choson dynasty, which relied for its survival on the protection of China. With the decline of China, overpowered by the increasing imperialist encroachment both of Japan and of the western powers, in 1910 Korea fell under the rule of Japan, as a protectorate officially, but in practice the country became a Japanese colony. Very soon a Korean nationalist movement began to take ground and in 1919 the death of the last Choson king caused violent reactions which were brutally repressed by the Japanese authorities with mass executions and many wounded and imprisoned. This occurrence showed that Korean nationalism was becoming a mass movement. From this movement emerged some leaders destined to become primary actors in the later history of Korea, although many years later, in particular Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku emerged as important leaders of the Korean nationalist movement which started to act in the far east, but principally outside the border of Korea, as more and more Korean exiles contributed to attract the attention of the great powers on the sad state of their country. Unfortunately inside the nationalist movement there were many differences of opinion as how to carry on the fight for the freedom of their country. A provisional Korean government was established abroad, mostly in China, and many attempts were made to attract the help and the attention of the great powers particularly of the USA and even the society of Nations in Geneva, but without much success, since during the years 1920-1930 other events in the far east were attracting more attention and causing the great powers to act with great caution. As a result of the great number of Koreans escaping from their country, many of them into China and Manchuria and some even in Russia, inside the nationalist movement Marxist ideas began to take hold and soon many Koreans became members of the Chinese Communist Party and soldiers in Mao Tse Tung's army. A few even served in the Russian army in WWII and became officers, so a Korean communist party came into being and two members of this party emerged and became eminent leaders, Kim Tubong and particularly Kim Il Sung, both to be noted as they had a great part in the history of the war.

The Korean situation began to draw the attention of the great powers in the later part of the second World War, when Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt having signed the famous Atlantic Charter, which was based on Wilson's 14 points, started to look ahead and discuss the settlements to be made after the end of the war. Naturally, since the USA was going to be the most powerful nation in the world, American interests both economic and political were going to be kept very much in view and in the Pacific area these interests were obviously very important. Also the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek was taking great interest on the subject of Korea, since he wished to keep the URSS out of any interference in the matters concerning the Korean peninsula, as he was fighting the communist army in China, backed by the Russians. Since Korea was considered a Japanese colony the main idea for the future was, by the great powers, to lead it gradually towards independence

through a period of fiduciary administration and it was verbally agreed at Yalta at the beginning of 1945 that there would be a participation of China and Great Britain in such administration. The new superpowers confirmed that no foreign troops would be stationed on Korean soil during such period. On the other hand the question of how to proceed in effecting this administration was left over and remained very vague. The war was not even over, Roosevelt died and with the new American president Truman the Yalta agreements entered into crisis. Moreover, since the URSS at the very last moment entered into the war with Japan, the whole matter of areas of influence in the far east became the subject of a series of agreements between Russians and Americans which led to a de facto military control of the whole peninsula replacing the Japanese. In fact the USA government was at this time beginning to be very concerned about the increasing soviet influence in the far east and that the whole of Korea might be overrun by Korean forces under communist influence stationed in Siberia. Therefore, while soviet forces moved towards North Korea, two colonels of the American army were ordered to establish a demarcation line across Korea defining a vast area controlled by the Americans, and these officers decided to consider the 38th parallel as the boundary line. On the 15th August Stalin accepted the American proposal of dividing in two parts the Korean peninsula. This was probably due to the fact that Stalin at this stage was hoping to be able to have an active part in the occupation of Japan and continue in the cooperation after the war.

The division of Korea is one of the most important events in the contemporary history of Korea as in the turn of less than five years it led to the war: if it had not taken place the post war condition of the country would certainly have been different and probably there would not have been any conflict ignoring the grave decisions which had been taken in Moscow and Washington, on the 15th August, day of the Japanese surrender, the Koreans celebrated what meant for them the conquest of their independence. In the chaos of the capitulation the Japanese colonial administration stipulated a political agreement with a leftist Korean nationalist. Yo Un-Hyong was active in the organization of a national movement with the purpose of creating an autonomous Korean government. People's Committees were formed in all the thirteen provinces, and in turn established contacts with the workers and students, farming associations and other groups. On the sixth of September, two days after the arrival of the American troops, a representatives meeting was held in Seoul for the setting upon the popular Korean Republic and the fixing of the date for the elections. The republic had a leftist leaning even though aside from some communists in a position of command, some men of conservative leanings appeared on the political scene, such as Syngman Rhee, to whom was assigned the Presidency of the government.

Towards the war

In the south the head of the American forces of occupation, general Hodge, received the order not to recognize the Popular Republic, since the committees were considered just a covering for the advance of communism in Korea, general Hodge had no knowledge or experience about Korea or Asia and tended to confuse the left with the communists who actually represented only a minority at the time. During the years 1946-1948 efforts were made at a diplomatic level to find a solution for the problems arising in Korea. The three

great powers (USA, URSS and Great Britain) held a meeting in Moscow in December 1945: the soviet foreign minister Molotov and the American secretary of state James Byrnes agreed on the institution of a Russian-American commission formed by the occupation authorities of north and south Korea. On the basis of this agreement, the commission would consult the Korean parties and the other social organizations having in view the setting up of a provisional Korean government subsequently the commission would negotiate between the provisional government and the government authorities of URSS, USA, China and Great Britain for the establishment of fiduciary administration for the duration of five years. After this period Korea would become an independent state.

Even though the USA and the Soviet Union engaged themselves to fully accomplish the Moscow agreement on Korea, the cooperation in North East Asia was bound to failure. Kim Il Jung arrived in North Korea in that period and before the commission met for the first time the soviet occupation authorities supervised the forming of a northern provisional administration managed by a people's temporary council led by Kim Il Sung. This action resulted in the strengthening of the left wing in North Korea and the gradual elimination of the non communists. On the other hand, in South Korea general Hodge was engaged in doing exactly the opposite, namely backing the right wing and opposing the left. Although General Hodge did not appreciate Rhee, he considered him a useful ally against the left. Therefore the Americans contrived to have him elected as leader of a parliamentary democratic council chiefly composed by members of the right. Meanwhile the Russian-American commission met for the first time in Seoul (20th March 1946) and worked for over two months without any success. The failure of the negotiation of the mixed commission gradually led to the forming of two governments in South Korea and in North Korea even a national army was being formed based on the many Koreans who had fought side by side with the Chinese communist army in Manchuria. The mixed commission met again in 1947 but reached a dead end and at this point the USA decided to take the matter to the attention of the United Nations. At the end of 1947 the United States, in spite of the opposition of the Soviet government, managed to obtain the approval of the ONU for the institution of a temporary commission for Korea (UNTOCOK) made up by representatives of Australia, Canada, Nationalist China, El Salvador, France, India, Philippines and Syria. The commission initially was supposed to supervise the elections in both North and South Korea, but since the communists did not allow the members of UNTOCOK to operate in the North, its activities were limited to the South. The involvement of the ONU in the question of Korea was a matter of great importance, since it set the basis for its entrance into the future conflict and also caused deep disagreements in the circle of the UN and even between the western allies. In 1948 general Hodge announced the first national elections in South Korea would take place at the beginning of May: although UNTOCOK declared valid the elections, many doubts arose since the left and some moderates refused to take part in them. Thus in December 1948 a resolution of the general assembly of the United Nations approved the final report of the commission and proclaimed the Republic of Korea the legitimate representative of that part of the country the UNTOCOK had been allowed to check. Since 1947 a kind of Marshall plan had been decided for Korea and helps of about 500 million dollars were granted to the country so as to build up the nation's economy and finances. On the 15th July 1948 Sygmun Rhee was officially proclaimed president, whereas

the Republic of Korea was officially proclaimed on the 15th August of the same year. More or less at the same time, with the elections of the 25th August, the North Korean Republic was born (9th September 1948). In the north Kim Il Sung gained a primary position with the support of the Soviets, of the security forces and of the army of North Korea (which was born formally in February 1948 with the name Korean People's Army, KPA). At the end of 1948 a war seemed to be inevitable, as the relationships between the countries were becoming even more strained: in the south the regime strengthened its power to the detriment of the local leftist groups backed by the north, from where "agents provocateurs" were being sent with the intent of initiating guerrilla operations against the Republic of Korea. While the two super powers were starting to recall their respective occupation forces, orders came from the northern capital to initiate in the south guerrilla activities. These activities took place in two areas of the south and were crushed with a lot of bloodshed by the republican army led by American military councilors. At this point Rhee asked openly the American government for military and economical help for the purpose of uniting Korea by way of a sudden attack. The Americans, fearing that this help might lead to a war, refused to help and Rhee had to abandon his plan. The USA on the other hand endeavored to strengthen South Korea ensuring military and economical aid, so that about 2500 American military councilors took the place of the troops which had been retired. Such a commitment for the building up of the new Korean state also meant that it implied clearly an acceptance of its defense in case of attack. It was a position that was more defensive than offensive as it was confirmed in a speech held by the American secretary of state Acheson in January 1950 in which he declared that in the case of any attack occurring west of Japan the initial repulse would come from the military forces on the spot subsequently from the whole civilized world under the aegis of the United Nations in support of those nations determined to protect their independence against foreign aggression. It seems that this warning was not taken into due account neither by Stalin nor by the North Koreans!

Kim Il Sung, unlike his foreign minister Pak Hon Yong, did not rely much on the communist resistance in that area, being influenced by his preceding experience under the Japanese occupation and therefore he considered that the help of both the Soviets and Chinese was necessary. This disagreement with Pak Hon Yong was only one of the many which led to the elimination and final execution of the foreign minister. Whereas the Chinese seemed to be inclined to help the North Korean cause, the Soviet government initially was quite reluctant. Stalin warned Kim during a visit in Moscow in 1949 that although the Americans had abandoned China, such was not the case for Korea. Also he stated that Russian people would not understand a war for Korea, which was outside the area of influence for the interests of the Soviet Union. It was clear that the Soviet Union had no intention of becoming involved in the area.

The Korean War

Meanwhile the 38th parallel, in spite of the restrictions imposed by the superpowers, was becoming less and less peaceful. Both parties had their responsibilities. Various skirmishes took place, but actually they remained limited to the demarcation zone and no major offensive was launched. Between 1945 and 1950 there were many changes in the international scenery which actually led to the real war. The fact that the first atomic bomb had been successfully produced by the Soviet Union in 1949 changed dramatically the balances of power in the world. Also significant was the birth of the new alliance between China and the Soviet Union. These events caused a race to rearmament in the USA; in particular president Truman decided to produce the very powerful hydrogen bomb and under the pressure of the American military circles an extremely important document was issued in the United States. Known as NSC68 (National Security Council 68) which upheld the militarization of the western alliance against the soviet menace and the document requested a great increase of the armed forces and a build up of the defense forces. The North Korean attack of the 25th June 1950 greatly increased the trend towards rearmament already approved by the Truman administration. In 1950 the North Korean army was 135'000 strong whereas the South Korean forces were 100'000 strong, but did not have any tanks or heavy artillery available. The attack took place at dawn and started in various points of the frontier line, while landings were carried out on the eastern coast. Even though, according to rumors, the southern army had prepared itself to face an attack, the North Koreans, with 130 tanks, 110 planes and heavy artillery quickly overstepped the enemy lines and moved towards the south.

Why did Kim Il Sung decide to attack at this time, since he had been discouraged in 1949 by Stalin? The fact is that Stalin changed his mind after the events which took place in 1949, previously mentioned, namely the pact with China and the production by Russia of the atomic bomb. Therefore on the 28th January 1950, erroneously believing that the United States would not rush to the help of South Korea, Stalin finally consented to back up the plan of Kim Il Sung, although his consent was limited, since he warned the North Koreans, during their visit, that they could not expect great assistance from the Soviet Union, because of far greater problems facing the Soviet Union in Europe and the West. Therefore Kim was to rely principally on the Chinese and anyway if the USA interfered the Soviets would not take part in the war. Kim had met Mao so as to be sure of his support. In a message to the Chinese before this meeting Stalin carefully disengaged the Soviet Union for any responsibility in case things went wrong, stressing the fact that the question was in the hands of the Chinese and Korean communists. During this meeting Mao expressed his fears about an American interference, but Kim argued that there would not be enough time since the war would be over in a matter of a few weeks. It is said that when Mao offered to send Chinese soldiers to the Chinese-Korean border, Kim refused declaring the Koreans would be able to control the situation. A bad and tragic mistake of appraisal was made by the communists as regards the strategy plans of the Truman administration concerning north eastern Asia at the beginning of 1950, which included the implied defense of the southern state. Moreover the opinion of the high American military circles was leaning towards an armed clash as a possible solution of the cold war. Also under political pressures at home concerning the prestige and the power of the United States, Truman,

who was in Missouri at his home in the day of the northern attack, having been urgently recalled to Washington, gave on the 26th of June the order to the American armed forces stationed in Japan to attack the North Koreans operating south of the 38th parallel, at the same time he ordered the seventh fleet to patrol the Formosa (Taiwan) straits, so as to discourage a Chinese attack on the island. Truman did not request the consent of the United Nations for these initial operations, thus avoiding possible criticism from the part of congress and allies and clearly confirming a leadership. On the 27th the Security Council approved the necessary international support approving a decision which entreated the members of the United Nations to offer the necessary assistance to the Korean Republic so as to repel the armed attack and establish peace and international security in the area. The British Commonwealth initially gave a limited military support, with Australia, Canada and New Zealand offering naval forces in aid of the American armed forces. Australia also sent an air squadron based in Japan and the same was done by South Africa. On the seventh of July the United Nations security council established a unified command (UNC) which from that moment encompassed all the South Korean and foreign forces fighting on the UN's side. The supreme command was entrusted to general Douglas MacArthur, the veteran of the Pacific war, commander in chief of the allied forces in Japan and head of the far-eastern American forces. Later on, mainly for political reasons, so as to boost the efforts of the Truman administration to obtain from Congress an increase in military funds and thus improving the NATO deterrent capacity, a number of countries contributed forces to the operations of the UNC. At the end there were soldiers from Australia, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Holland, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey and the United States fighting under the UNC. Italy, India, Norway and Sweden supplied medical assistance. The Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, sent his imperial guard, which apparently gave a very good account of itself, according to a book subsequently published in Ethiopia to celebrate the event.

The first two months of the war brought a considerable advance of the North Korean army and at the end of August only a small area in the south east of Korea was still under control of the UNC. In September a counter-offensive was organized and on the 15th General MacArthur launched a great landing with 80'000 men at Inchon, a harbor in the western part of Korea, which was manned by only a few thousand of North Korean troops and situated just below the 38th parallel. This proved to be a very skillful strategic move on the part of MacArthur and very soon the northern army was compelled to retreat. Seoul was reconquered on the 28th of September. At this point the UNC counteroffensive could have reestablished the situation and brought it to the "status quo ante bellum". But the order to cross the 38th parallel was given. The USA and the western allies were convinced that the crossing of the 38th parallel would have positive effects for the cold war in general and so this decision caused instead a further escalation of the conflict and gave place to disastrous consequences.

The South Koreans were the most eager supporters of the United Nations offensive as they hoped to proceed in the unification of their country at their own conditions, avoiding the danger of North Korea again being occupied by foreign powers. Also America's allies, although worried about possible Chinese reactions, largely upheld the offensive in the

north. The day before Seoul was occupied, Truman had confirmed the conclusions of document NSC 81/1, which authorized the units of the United Nations to cross the 38th parallel; on the basis of the orders that the commander of the ONU forces had received on the 29th September, only the Korean forces could be employed near the soviet and Chinese borders. In the case of a soviet intervention, MacArthur was to place his troops in a defensive position and consult Washington, whereas in the case of Chinese intervention the general was authorized to continue the offensive up to the point of a reasonable possibility of obtaining a victory. On the 7th October the general assembly of the United Nations approved a resolution which demanded the creation of conditions of stability in the entire Korean country and the forming of a United Nation's commission for the unification and reconstruction of the entire country (UNCURK), also to supervise the elections in the whole of Korea. On the same day American troops crossed the 38th parallel and two days after MacArthur launched an ultimatum to the North Koreans but on the 10th October, during a broadcast from the Pyongyang radio Kim opposed a clearcut refusal. In the east South Korean troops reached Wonsan, an important industrial town and principal port for the landing of soviet supplies arriving from Vladivostok, about one hundred miles north of the 38th parallel, while in the west this swift advance was counterbalanced by the advance of the other United Nations forces which on the 20th October captured the capital of North Korea, Pyongyang. During this part of the war, the Northkorean army, now about 60'000 strong was retiring towards the north, taking with them most of the prisoners of war, while the North Korean government met again in the city of Kanggye, by the river Yalu. At this point, with the North Korean situation becoming desperate, Mao, with the many doubts and misgivings, and also under Stalin's pressure, decided to intervene. On both sides there had been wrong interpretations of the adversary intentions, so that both sides were surprised by the successive events. Mao sent about 260'000 so called Chinese volunteers across the border and the first clashes took place on the 25th October. The armies of South Korea, USA and other allies were not prepared to face the onslaught of the subsequent waves of Chinese attacks. A counter attack planned by MacArthur was repulsed by the Chinese volunteers. This situation was causing great worries to the western allies and the fear of a global war was increasing, especially when Truman announced during a press conference that the USA were ready to use any weapon, including the atomic bomb for the conclusion of the Korean situation. The allies of the USA were considerably alarmed by these developments, particularly the British Commonwealth members and Britain's prime minister Attlee organized a visit to Washington to inform Truman that the allies were not prepared for a further extension of the conflict with China. The French government was also becoming very concerned. Not with standing the attitude of the allied countries, the USA persisted in assuming a firmer position against China, since many high level American political men and also general MacArthur were in favor of extreme measures to be taken. In fact general MacArthur at the end of December produced a list of targets both in Korea and China which should be attacked, even with the employment of the atomic bombs. On the other hand the Chinese informed the ONU secretary, Trygve Lee, that they would not seriously consider any truce or armistice until certain conditions were fulfilled, such as the retirement of ONU armies from Korea and of the seventh fleet from the Formosa straits and various other conditions. The pressures on the American administration were increased by a new offensive carried out by the Chinese which brought them again beyond the 38th

parallel in January, when they again occupied Seoul. In December the command of the 8th army was handed to general Ridgway, veteran of WWII. Under his command the allied armies managed to stop the Chinese offensive and then to drive back again the enemy until, with great difficulty, the 38th parallel was for another time reached and at last Seoul was again liberated. Now Washington had to realize that the war had to come to a standstill. In fact a declaration was announced that the USA were prepared to start negotiations for a truce although they had no intentions of discussing matters concerning Formosa or a seat in ONU for the Chinese. However MacArthur at this point tried to sabotage this step by way of launching an ultimatum to the Chinese on his own initiative: the ultimatum stated that the Chinese should accept to negotiate the end of the war at the ONU conditions or be subject to a military defeat. This initiative by MacArthur, which greatly upset the American allies, also perturbed Truman himself who considered himself personally offended as the general had patently disobeyed orders, for the second time in fact, since, as we have seen previously, also he had disobeyed when he had sent not only the South Korean but also the allied forces towards the Chinese and soviet borders. MacArthur could have been discharged in the spot, but fearing the effects this might have on public opinion, Truman limited his actions by merely censuring him. Less than two weeks later a letter to the republican leader in congress Martin was sent by MacArthur in which the general stated that “nothing could substitute victory” and also contained various criticism about the strategy of the current American administration. Martin published this letter and this made the scales turn. With the support of the defense secretary Marshall, Truman decided to remove the general from command. This decision was taken on the 11th April 1951 and great was the relief on the part of America’s closest allies, whereas it very much displeased Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek. Ridgway immediately received the order to relieve MacArthur. MacArthur’s fall did not stop spring offensive by China which lasted until the end of May and caused the most violent fighting of the whole war during which the Chinese themselves lost about 200’000 men.

1951’s Turn and the signing of the Armistice

In this period atomic weapons, which were already based in the island of Guam, were also based in the western Pacific area, as a further deterrent. At the end of May, in a situation of virtual stalemate, both sides started to look for a way of starting peace negotiations. In the 23rd June 1951 Malik, soviet member of the ONU declared that negotiations for an armistice should start so as to arrange the 38th parallel as a border between the two Korean countries. On instructions from Washington, Ridgway announced that he was ready for a meeting with the North Koreans and the Chinese. The communists suggested that the meetings should take place in the city of Kaesong, in territory controlled by the communists, just south of the 38th parallel, and the commander of the ONU forces received the order to accept this proposal. In spite of all the hopes regarding an early armistice, the negotiations went on for over two years, and so did the fighting.

In Kaesong the negotiations approved a plan of works based on five points: first an approval of the order of the day, second the definition of a line of military demarcation and of a demilitarized zone (DMZ), third a cease fire and agreement of inspections, fourth arrangement for the prisoners of war, fifth advice to both countries. For various weeks no

progress was made and then the negotiations started again in another location, that is to say Panmunjeom, 5 miles to the east of Kaesong. Here a certain initial success was achieved and between October 1951 and the beginning of May 1952 various important questions had been solved and the communists accepted the request of the UNC regarding the provisional line of the cease fire along the actual fighting line and the following day the parties agreed on a demilitarized area of 4 km. in February 1952 they agreed on a conference to discuss political matters, including the withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea and the peaceful solution of the Korean problem within 90 days from the signature of the armistice. These results eventually were the basis for the Geneva conference on Korea. Also in May the parts agreed to appoint delegates from Sweden, Switzerland, Poland and Czechoslovakia for a commission of neutral countries to supervise the realization of an agreement for a final armistice. After these initial successful developments the negotiations dragged on for one and a half year. One of the main reasons for these delays was that on both sides the negotiators were chosen from military personnel, not diplomats, and therefore more apt to fight rather than find peaceful solutions. Also the stiffening of the American position had a part in this delay. One of the principal stumbling-blocks was the question of the prisoners of war. Whereas the number of prisoners in communist hands was declared to be 7142 Southcorean soldiers and 4417 United Nation's soldiers, the soldiers in the hands of the UNC were about 132'000, many of which apparently were not willing to return to North Korea or China; the western allies were favorable to a voluntary return of the prisoners and this position was backed up by western public opinion. The communists did not accept this position, especially after they heard that only 70000 prisoners were prepared to return to the North. In fact the crux of the problem was that out of 21'000 Chinese prisoners 16'000 did not wish to return. As the Americans and the United Nations were firm on their positions the negotiations came to a standstill for another year. Meanwhile two other events were taking place in the world, which, although not directly connected with Korea itself, were to have a final effect on the Korean war. In America, on the fourth of November 1952, general Eisenhower, was elected president of the United States. In Russia, on the fifth of March 1953, Stalin died. Stalin's heirs, if so they may be called, were more inclined towards peaceful solutions and Stalin's death marked a pause in the cold war and very soon there was a Russian declaration that the Soviet Union believed that there were no questions with the United States that could not be arranged peacefully. After various discussions between minister Malenkov and Zhou Enlay, who was in Moscow for Stalin's funeral, the two communist allies started to develop a strategy to put an end to the conflict. So on the 30th March Zhou announced his agreement for the reciprocal exchange of prisoners of war either wounded or ill. He also declared that those prisoners who did not wish to be sent home could be entrusted to a neutral country that could finally decide their future. These important concessions were a clear sign that the communists were now ready to reach an agreement on the matter of prisoners. In fact various thousands of wounded and sick were exchanged under the operation "little switch" between April and May 1953. More or less at the same time the Indian delegation at the United Nations made an attempt to solve the problem of the prisoners of war. The proposal of the Indian delegation caused a series of discussions and had to be revised significantly, but at the end was approved by the general assembly of the United Nations, but having been rejected by the communists ended without any practical results. Meanwhile,

especially during the summer of 1952 the Americans increased the air attacks on North Korea so as to strengthen the pressure on the communists and induce them to accept the negotiation position of the UNC. In June they attacked a dam near the Yalu river along the borders of China, causing alarm to their allies and in another raid in July American, Korean and Australian pilots carried out a most destructive attack on Pyongyang with bombs and napalm, so that there was very little left to destroy. At this time the new republican administration under general Eisenhower was taking a firmer position against the communists and was developing plans for obtaining a "limited victory" in Korea. This was the result of the more aggressive attitude of the republican party who had brought Eisenhower to power and also the ONU commander general Mark Clark was clearly leaning towards these aggressive positions and the threat of the possible use of atomic bombs, while alarming considerably the American allies was on the other side also having its effect on the communist opponents. The result of these combined factors, Stalin's death, the disastrous conditions of North Korea under continuous bombardments, the atomic threat and the aggressive position of the United States under Eisenhower, was that finally the communists decided to accept the UNC conditions and in June 1953 at last all the details for agreement were ready to be signed. Even at the last moment a stumbling block occurred: the South Korean president Syngman Rhee made an attempt to sabotage the final agreement by releasing without informing the UNC, all the North Korean prisoners of war (over 24'000 managed to escape). Immediately the negotiations were interrupted and on the 24th of June the communists launched a limited offensive against the South Korean military positions. After having successfully shown to the South Korean that any one-sided initiative would have disastrous effects, in spite of the persistent opposition of the South Koreans who still insisted that the two Koreas should be united, the discussions were again resumed and at last the armistice was signed by all parties concerned except for the South Korean who refused to sign it. The United States, so as to induce South Korea to accept the agreement went as far as negotiating a treaty of mutual defense with Syngman Rhee but the South Koreans stubbornly refused to take part in the armistice. Such situation has never changed and remains so even nowadays, about sixty years since the armistice was signed by all the other parties. This explains the reason for which there remains an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension in the peninsula which periodically causes worldwide alarm and concern.

After the Armistice and the Geneva Conference

In August 1953, following the armistice, the "big switch" operation started, that is to say the redelivery of the prisoners. About 76'000 prisoners were delivered to the Chinese and North Korean whereas another 130'000 were returned to ONU through the demilitarized zone. More than 22'000 communists on one side and 359 on the other were entrusted to the neutral nations committee for repatriation. Of these, only 600 of the first side and 10 of the other side decided to return home. At the end of January the prisoners who did not wish to return home were freed and the neutral country commission voted the end of its activities. The cost in terms of human lives that the endless armistice negotiations caused was enormous. Nearly half of the killed and wounded of the whole war suffered their fate during the armistice talks. As regards the UNC forces the losses were about 125'000, while according to American sources the communist losses amounted to about 300'000. Overall

the whole war, apart from the terrible distress caused by the destructions in both North and South Korea appears to have cost nearly 4 million lives, including many civilians. Entire populations lost their homes and were subject to endless sufferings and in many cases the lack of food caused severe epidemics.

A few words about the great Korean political leaders, who at the end of these events found the situation exactly back to the starting point. Both Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung gained in power during the war. Syngman Rhee, who had become very popular in South Korea, remained president until 1960, when his government fell under the pressure of American diplomacy and internal opposition. On the other side Kim Il Sung was very capable in using the war to reaffirm his power and to get rid of any opponents. His greatest rival Pak Honyong, vice president and foreign minister, having been accused of an attempt, with others, to organize a "coup d'etat" was sentenced to death in 1953. Kim, who became the most longlived Stalinist leader in the world, remained in power until 1994, acclaimed as the great leader of his country.

One of the armistice articles had established that within 90 days from the signature of the armistice a conference should be held to examine the Korean situation. So the great powers, USA, Great Britain, France and Soviet Union in a meeting in Berlin decided to hold the international conference in Geneva which officially started in 1954 In April. The conference was doomed to failure even before it began for a number of reasons, which can be briefly summarized. Firstly the Eastasian areas were suddenly again being disturbed by the serious developments of the new war in Vietnam. In the second place the United States had just signed with the republic of South Korea a treaty of reciprocal defense, which carefully stated that the United States were not bound to come to the aid of South Korea unless the country was being attacked. This was of course done so that Syngman Rhee should be prevented from taking rash enterprises, and actually it took a great deal of diplomacy and the promise of considerable military and economical aid to induce Syngman Rhee to send his envoys to Geneva, but only with the aim of obtaining the total reunion of the two Koreas. As China and Soviet Russia were on their side busily helping the reconstruction of North Korea economically and military, it was quite clear that all parties concerned had basically resigned themselves to the fact that the reunification of the two Koreas was not realistic. None of the different plans presented by the parties seemed to be acceptable by the opposite side. On the 15th June 1954 the conference closed down practically accepting the "status quo". In fact the Geneva conference implicitly accepted the division of the country in two parts but also managed to avoid any further clash. The Geneva conference also had a beneficial effect, in as much as it helped to cancel a reason of contrast between the great powers. Finally one has to admit that for over 50 years peace, however uncertain, has reigned between the two Koreas and certain encouraging events have taken place, such as the membership of both Koreas in the United Nations, the diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea have been established both with China and Russia and moreover the exchange of goods between China and South Korea has enormously increased. But the definite peace treaty has yet to be signed so this long story still has to await the final conclusions.

Chapter 2: The DMZ and facts about it

Since the signing of the Armistice, Panmunjeom has been the locations where North meets South to address military, economic and political issues. The armistice signatories established a number of rules governing the activity in the zone. Red Cross representatives, Olympic officials, economic advisors as well as military negotiators have convened meetings at Panmunjeom in an attempt to keep peace and reunite the Peninsula. Each side could and did send small, lightly armed patrols to monitor the region, but the agreement prohibited the deployment of mortars, artillery, tanks, or any other type of heavy weapons. The settlement also prohibited the construction of fortifications in the DMZ. In the years following the armistice, there were a few scattered exchanges of gunfire. These episodes resulted in eight American fatalities, but were isolated and never precipitated a major crisis.

On June 24, 1951, North Korea, through the Soviet Ambassador to the UN, recommended a truce line to be formed on the 38th parallel. At this time the UNC forces were dug-in 80 km north of the 38th parallel. After an exchange of counteroffers, the talks began at Kaesong and were later moved to the neutral site at Panmunjeom which was destroyed during the Korean War. In order to negotiate the Armistice, a tent city was constructed. In the years that followed each side constructed its own buildings in the Joint Security Area(JSA), and there are 24 buildings in the area today which is approximately 800 meters in diameter. The JSA houses the Advance Secretariat of the UNCMAC and various offices and conference rooms and it straddles the Military Demarcation Line(MDL). In fact, the MDL passes through the center of the negotiating table in the Military Armistice Commission building. The four Korean People's Army guard posts south of the MDL were dismantled following the negotiations that occurred after the Panmunjeom Axe Murder Incident on August 18, 1976, which will be explained later.

After the signing of the 1953's Armistice a period of quite peaceful coexistence occurred until the end of the '60s; the South Koreans refer to the years 1966-69 as the "Quite War", since the fighting were originally seen as a nuisance rather than a serious danger, even though they eventually threatened to explode into a crisis of the first magnitude.

The DMZ runs more or less along the 38th Parallel and it has been one of the most tense fronts in the Cold War. In the Armistice the DMZ was created since both sides agreed to move their own troops back 2000 m from the front line, creating in this way the buffer zone 4 km wide which is de facto the Korean Demilitarized Zone. The Armistice Agreement explains exactly how many military personnel and what kind of weapons are allowed in the DMZ. Sporadic outbreaks of violence have killed over 500 South Korean soldiers, 50 US soldiers and 250 soldiers from DPRK(Democratic People's Republic of Korea) along the DMZ between 1953 and 1999.

This chapter will first explain and describe what the DMZ looks like and what are its most important spots. After that it will describe some crucial events that occurred during the cold war.

Ready on the DMZ

The primary mission of the combat forces in the vicinity of Panmunjeom is to deter war. Quick Reaction Forces, Guard Post duty are every day words for these soldiers as these troops conduct their missions every day of the year. These soldiers remain in a high state of readiness. The soldiers' weapon, protective mask and individual equipment must always be ready. His weapon must be zeroed, his vehicles must be operational and with a full load of fuel. There's no time for anything but to receive a fast briefing on the mission and move out. Some JSA soldiers are ready to move on minutes' notice. This requires them to sleep in their uniforms, eat in their barracks, rather than in dining facilities, and stay together at all times. These soldiers' dedication and professional conduct contribute toward maintaining peace on this Peninsula; the price of freedom remains eternal vigilance.

As said, the Joint Security Area straddles the Military Demarcation Line. Each country has its own entrances for the JSA: North Korea has two ways which cross the Bridge of No Return over the Seocheongang River and the 72-Hour Bridge. Prior to the brutal Panmunjeom Axe Murder Incident, both sides had access to either side and the only entrance for the North was the Bridge of No Return. This bridge is the spot where all prisoners of war were repatriated after the end of the Korean War. The returning UNC prisoner stopped at the bridge while exchange lists were verified. Once repatriated he went to a tent city where he discarded the Communist prisoners of war uniform, showered received new uniforms and a meal of real food including an ice cream. The crew of the USS *Pueblo* returned across this bridge. This remains the only ground link between Seoul and Pyongyang. The Bridge was the primary entrance to the JSA by the North Koreans while each side had free access to the entire JSA. At that time the UNC Checkpoint 3 was known as "the loneliest outpost in the world" as it is just meters from North Korea. In 1976 it was decided that the JSA would no longer be completely neutral and that the only personnel authorized to cross the MDL would be from the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission.

The only human inhabitants of the DMZ are the members of the NNSC and the villagers of Daeseong-dong. The North Korean Propaganda Village is merely a village in a caretaker status. The village of Daeseong-dong, or Freedom Village, is adjacent to the Military Demarcation Line. Daeseong-dong can be translated "Attaining Success Town". The residents have elected to reside on their ancestral homes rather than relocate to a safer life in the South. The citizens live under very rigid conditions as they must be out of their fields and in their village by dark each day and must be at home and accounted for with their windows and doors secured by 11:00 o'clock each night. They are continually blasted with propaganda from loudspeakers at the Propaganda Village. The North Korean village of Gijeong-dong, better known as Propaganda Village, is also located in the DMZ. Its nickname has different reasons, first and foremost of which is the extensive loud speaker system which broadcasts to the citizens of Daeseong-dong and to anyone who will listen to the praises of Kim Il Sung, the great, god-like leader of North Korea. These broadcasts are emitted 6 to 12 hours a day, mostly at night. A second reason that this is a village with no citizens, although 15 to 20 workers are present every day, they are nothing more than caretakers of this village as they raise and lower the flag and maintain the facilities.

The United Nations Command Security Battalion-JSA is the unit tasked to provide all logistical support and security to all United Nations Command personnel working in the JSA. The UNCSB-JSA will continue to carry out its vital mission and as long as the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission exists, the soldiers of the JSA will continue to live up to their motto: "In Front of Them All".

The Quite War

From 1966 to 1969, American and South Korean troops fought a series of skirmishes against North Korean soldiers in an undeclared war along the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas. The "Quiet War," as South Koreans came to refer to these incidents, had important ramifications in Vietnam and Washington. On several occasions, the peninsula teetered on the edge of war. The United States tried to contain this danger, while South Korea attempted to enflame the crisis. These differences reflected divergent political goals, and eventually forced the two countries to cancel military plans in Vietnam at a critical juncture in that conflict.

Before 1966 the Peninsula was living a certain period of peace. This stable, but semi-dangerous, state of affairs began to change in the fall of 1966. In October, North Korean troops began making small, armed incursions across the demarcation line. A Central Intelligence Agency map of these confrontations shows that these raids occurred almost equally in the eastern, central, and western sectors of the demilitarized zone. The North Koreans attacked only South Korean units, killing twenty-eight soldiers. American troops were not involved in these engagements. These raids infuriated the South Korean military, and they quietly began planning a retaliatory raid. The Koreans never told their American allies anything about this operation. Nevertheless, General Charles H. Bonesteel III, American commander in Korea, heard rumors about the planned raid. Bonesteel served as both the commanding general of the U.S. Eighth Army and Commander-in-Chief United Nations (UN) Command. In this latter position he had operational command of all Korean combat forces. On 20 October, Bonesteel met with Kim Sungeun, the Minister of National Defense, and told him that an attack could have severe and unintended political and diplomatic impact on the pending visit of President Lyndon Johnson to the peninsula. Two days later, Bonesteel met with General Kim Kae-wan, the Chief of Staff of the ROK Army, and delivered the same message. But the warnings were ignored. On 26 October, American officers in Bonesteel's command began receiving fragmentary information about a raid into North Korea. The Americans quickly confirmed a "highly successful" foray in the eastern sector of the DMZ that resulted in thirty North Korean casualties. Bonesteel was unable to learn if the raid went beyond the northern edge of the demilitarized zone.

When Johnson arrived in Korea, President Park Chung-hee down-played the attacks and probes. He stated that the North normally staged a number of incidents and incursions during key moments in international affairs to distract the public of the South. According to the American record of the conversation, Park told his guest that "these incidents are an irritating factor, but not a serious danger." The Korean president did, however, warn his

American counterpart: "If fighting increases in Vietnam, there may be increased and more sustained pressure at the DMZ". But just a few hours after the meeting the North Koreans responded the raid back: two American four-man squads had combined after one of their radios became inoperative. As the group moved under the light of a full moon, they walked into a trap. North Korean troops quietly marched parallel to the Americans, set up a hastily prepared position and began throwing grenades and firing on the Americans. Only one American soldier out of eight survived because he acted like if he was dead when the North Koreans went there to strip the bodies of ammunition, weapons and souvenirs. The United States responded with a public relations offensive and the Army let the survived soldier talk to reporters after he spent two days in the hospital. On November 5, 1966, US General Richard Cicoleta delivered a warning message to the North Koreans: "Make no mistake. The path of self-destruction that you have trod is leading toward more bloodshed. The responsibility for whatever course may develop from continued acts of hostility will rest clearly on your side". The General intended for these remarks to convey a strong and firm warning, while avoiding specific threats. President Johnson didn't really talk about the incident, but when he flew back to Washington he announced that: "The United States of America does not plan to violate the terms of the armistice". When the North Korean representatives argued that no engagement had occurred, Cicoleta offered to fly them to the location and let them inspect the site on their own. A helicopter then landed at Panmunjom, but the North Koreans declined the flight.

North Korean attacks on South Korean and American troops continued after the 2 November ambush. There were, however, few attacks in the winter months, when the bitter cold and the lack of foliage for cover made combat operations difficult. All told, there were a total of forty-two incidents in 1966. In March and April 1967, when the temperature increased, the attacks started again. The engagements in the spring were small and involved lightly armed patrols, but grew in size and intensity in the summer. This seasonal pattern held throughout the Quiet War. The frequency and intensity of these incidents exploded in 1967, expanding to include encounters in the air and on the water. North Korean jets crossed into South Korean airspace. North Korean shore batteries fired on and sank a South Korean ship in January. The ROK Navy sank several ships attempting to land infiltrators in April. Two ship-to-shore firefights, one in the South and one in the North, followed later that year. In the summer months North Korean units forced the residents of small, southern villages to attend political indoctrination meetings. In August North Korean artillery fired on a South Korean army barracks, and communist commandos blew up a train well south of the DMZ. Korea had become a combat zone. American soldiers found duty difficult in the demilitarized zone, with its ever-present danger: "At night when you hear a can rattling or an animal moving you think this is it, they're coming across," a noncommissioned officer said.

As difficult and dangerous as the Quiet War was for the soldiers fighting and dying in the DMZ, it remained a minor, but troubling issue for the United States. Vietnam was the major American concern in Asia at the moment, and the Republic of Korea had been extremely supportive of that effort, sending two army divisions to Vietnam in 1965 and 1966. In December 1967, and in the first weeks of 1968, repeated American efforts to get a third Korean division in Vietnam were beginning to produce results. President Park met with

Johnson while the two were in Canberra, Australia, and agreed to send an additional light division. The goal for the arrival in Vietnam of the new ROK Army division was March 1968, just two months away. North Korean actions quickly scuttled this agreement. On Thursday, 18 January, thirty-one men crossed over the military demarcation line and silently passed through an American-monitored sector. The group traveled only at night, keeping to mountain ridges. Each man in this unit was an officer in his mid-twenties who had been training for this mission for two years. These commandos were well armed with grenades, automatic weapons, and explosives. The target of the raid was the Blue House, the official residence of President Park. The mission was simple: assassinate Park. A secondary target was the U.S. embassy. On 21 January, a thousand yards short of their objective, a suspicious police officer stopped the commandos and quickly exposed the North Koreans. The commandos killed one policeman and retreated as a running firefight broke out in the middle of Seoul. The government reacted forcefully, imposing a dusk-to-dawn curfew for the area north of Seoul; the North Koreans split into small groups as they fled into the mountains north of Seoul. An alerted civilian population made hiding difficult. Eventually a few made it back across the DMZ, but most were killed in isolated exchanges of gunfire with South Korean and American patrols. In the United States, the primary concern remained Vietnam rather than Korea. In nationally televised remarks on the Quiet War, Johnson made this point clear. According to the President, North Korea was trying to intimidate the South: "These attacks may also be an attempt by the communists to divert South Korean and United States military resources which together are now successfully resisting aggression in Vietnam". But the Koreans had a different point of view: they warned the Americans that they were planning retaliatory measures. If there were another major infiltration, ROK armed forces would respond. President Park told the US ambassador William Porter that the South did not want another war, but could no longer remain "passive" in the face of continued northern raids. The Americans were determined to seek a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The United States would consult with the Republic of Korea before it took any military action and expected the same consideration in return. But American hopes for a third division ended on 22 March, when the U.S. embassy in Seoul reported that Foreign Minister Choi had announced that South Korea would not send any more troops to Vietnam.³⁹ The United States would have to deal with the manpower issue without any Korean assistance. Three weeks later, as if to confirm the wisdom of the ROK decision, the North Koreans started their raids into the south again. The United States and South Koreans worked to make the attacks more difficult. The allies started using searchlights, electronic sensors, and night scopes. Army engineers also used heavy diesel plows and defoliants to remove much of the shrubbery along the military demarcation line, making it harder for enemy troops to hide and ambush American and South Korean patrols. Bonesteel ordered the construction of a chain-link fence across the DMZ.

The Quiet War continued after Lyndon Johnson left office in 1969. The new President, Richard M. Nixon, inherited a dangerous situation. The North Korean attacks resumed again after the spring thaw. In the early morning hours of 15 April, the North Koreans shot down a U.S. Navy EC-121 electronic reconnaissance aircraft off the east coast, killing all thirty-one aboard. This attack caused the largest loss of American life in Korea since the

end of the war in 1953. The plane was on a routine mission with orders to fly no closer than forty nautical miles to the North Korean coast; it was ninety miles away when it disappeared from radar screens. Nixon was informed about the attack that morning. In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor, called it the first major crisis of the new administration. "We were being tested, and therefore force must be met with force" Nixon declared. Two factions quickly developed in the administration over how to respond. Kissinger, his staff, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, Haldeman, and Nixon formed one group that favored military retaliation. Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird opposed this option, advised caution, and suggested-oblivious of events of the past two and a half years-that the downing might be an isolated incident. The options that emerged were either to launch a retaliatory strike against North Korean air bases, or to continue the reconnaissance flights with armed escort. Nixon continued to consider a retaliatory strike. After a press conference and some ceremonial duties in the White House Rose Garden, the President talked individually with Kissinger and Haldeman. According to his Chief of Staff, Nixon weighed alternatives and considered the ramifications of a retaliation. Kissinger privately polled Rogers, Laird, and Richard M. Helms, director of the CIA. All three opposed an attack. A meeting on Saturday resolved the issue. After Rogers and Laird said they would quit if Nixon bombed North Korea, the President relented. Nixon retained ambiguous feelings about his decision. He realized he had few options: "As long as we were involved in Vietnam, we simply did not have the resources or public support for another war in another place". Nevertheless, Nixon could never stomach the fact that he had few choices. He remarked to Kissinger: "They got away with it this time, but they'll never get away with it again". The downing of the EC-121 was the last major incident of the Quiet War. The North Koreans shot down an American helicopter in August and held the crew captive for three and a half months, but raids across the DMZ began to fade in number. The North Koreans ended the Quiet War for the same mysterious reasons they started the conflict. In 1970 the Nixon administration believed the peninsula was secure enough to remove the 7th Infantry Division, and informed the South Korean government of such an intention in July. The withdrawal started in 1971.

Moments of crisis would visit the Korean peninsula again and again in the following decades, but these dangerous encounters were different from the Quiet War, involving neither intelligence operations or fears of another northern invasion. In neither type of incident were the fatalities as extensive as those suffered during the Quiet War.

The Panmunjeom Axe Murder Incident

The Panmunjeom Axe Murder Incident occurred at approximately 11:00 AM on August 18, 1976. A UNC work force was to prune a poplar tree which was located about 80 meters east of the Bridge of No Return. The tree needed to be trimmed, as it blocked the view between a UN observation point and UNC checkpoint 3, which was situated next to the Bridge of No Return and was the northernmost UNC checkpoint. The guard at checkpoint 3 is addicted to the Military Demarcation Line and has called his post the "loneliest place in

the world". There needed to be unimpaired vision between the observation point and the checkpoint. In fact, the trimming trees, cutting of trees, cleaning brush, etc. was considered routine work at the JSA and had been accomplished over the years by both sides without any serious incident. Although the poplar tree was clearly on the southern side of the Military Demarcation Line(MDL), it was next to the road the North Korean People's Army(KPA) guards used to enter and exit the JSA. The KPA would enter the JSA by crossing the Bridge of No Return, passing by UNC Checkpoint 3, and turn left just past the tree on their way to their work area. Later on the KPA would state that the poplar tree was a tree that was planted and nurtured by the North Koreans.

On August 6, four UNC guards and six Koreans Service Corps workers began to accomplish their routine task which was to trim the tree. A KPA guard questioned them and told them to leave the tree alone. However, the KPA did not lodge a protest nor call for an immediate on-the-spot Security Officers Meeting to protest as is the usual custom. Since the KPA had shown an interest in the tree, the JSA commander took several additional precautions before proceeding with the work. He organized a ten-man security force, stationed the rest of the duty platoon at UNC checkpoint 4 as a quick reaction force, placed additional guards and cameras at another observation point, designated a foreman to supervise the Korean Service Corps workers, and directed the on-scene, commander to request an on-the-spot Security Officer's Meeting should a confrontation occur.

At 10:30 on August 18, 1976, the UNC work party arrived at the tree to begin their work. Within a minute or so, a KPA lieutenant and nine guards arrived and were briefed on the task. The work began without incident. However, approximately at 10:50, the KPA lieutenant demanded that the work stop. The officer in charge, Captain Bonifas, directed the workers to continue since this was a legitimate activity and the work needed to be accomplished. The KPA lieutenant dispatched a runner to get reinforcements. By 11:00 the number of KPA guards had grown to 30. The KPA officer again ordered the work to stop. When the work continued, he removed his watch, wrapped it in a handkerchief, placed it in his pocket and yelled: "kill the Americans". The targets of the attack were the two Americans officers as they were pounced upon immediately.

The axes brought in by the work force were savagely used by the KPA during the fight. The clash lasted only four minutes. The momentum of the attack was disrupted when the driver of the truck pulled his truck forward to protect the already mutilated body of captain Bonifas from further assault. This movement was enough to cause the North Koreans to break off the attack and scramble to safety across the Bridge of No Return. However captain Bonifas and lieutenant Barrett were slain while four US enlisted men and four soldiers were injured. The KPA casualties are still unknown. However, at a later meeting the KPA claimed five of their soldiers were injured; the world waited to see what would happen in this corner of the world on the edge of freedom.

For three days that tree stood as a challenge to free men everywhere. Immediately after the fight, the Quick Reaction Forces of the JSA were ready for immediate deployment. A UNC Crisis Action Team was formed in Yongsan. Across the entire peninsula, troops increased their readiness as planners developed what would be known as Operation Paul Bunyan. The foremost American in the field of tree-cutting was the legendary Paul Bunyan, who cut down eighty-one trees with one swipe of his mighty ax. There are many tales about Paul Bunyan and his great blue ox, Babe that are told in lumber camps in the

United States. It was appropriate then that the name of this operation to cut down the poplar tree be codenamed Operation Paul Bunyan.

The UNC plan was developed to establish the right of movement in the JSA, to remove the tree from the JSA, and to generate sufficient combat power to accomplish the mission. The border of cutting down the poplar tree fell on the shoulders of the 2nd Engineer Battalion. The commander of the UNCSF-JSA would control all actions in Panmunjeom and the 2nd Battalion would provide the security.

As the planners from the US 2nd Infantry division and JSA were developing courses of action, US Air Force and Naval units were ordered to Korea. The men of the 2nd Battalion knew that something was going to happen. On August 5 the battalion went on alert because of a machine gun firing incident on the DMZ. A day earlier had been started with an early morning alert to initiate the 3rd Brigade Command Post Exercise. Because this was the third alert in one month when the normal rate was one or maximum two and because minutes later after the alert sirens sounded a medical evacuation helicopter landed momentarily at Camp Graves en route to the 121 Medical Evacuation Hospital at Seoul, the soldiers knew this was more than a training exercise. When the live ammunition, to include TOW rounds (anti-tank weapons capable of defeating armor) were distributed in accordance with the company supply plans, each soldier knew that this was for real and that his unit was going in. Simultaneously a tank-heavy team was formed at Camp Casey ready to reduce Panmunjeom to a parking lot if necessary to accomplish the mission. The 2nd Aviation Battalion Commander planned how he would support his operation with Cobra attack helicopters and 20 Huey helicopters. The engineers planned to cut the tree and were assigned three other missions: be prepared to perform demolition guard duties on the Freedom Bridge, destroy the illegal roadblocks placed in the southern portion of the JSA by the KPA and be prepared to conduct a hasty river crossing to evacuate soldiers south across the Imjingang River.

JSA soldiers, infantrymen, engineers, helicopter pilots, mechanics, artillerymen and other support personnel planned and rehearsed their plans, checked and double-checked from their alert until the first truck crossed the start point.

The operation that unfolded at 07:00 Saturday morning August 21, 1976, paralleled the plan. Reveille was 04:00 for the 1st ROK Infantry Division Recon Company and at 04:30 hours for all other soldiers in Task Force Vierra, the unit charged with cutting the tree. At 05:00 sirens sounded throughout the 2nd Infantry Division area placing their units on alert and scrambling soldiers to their vehicles for immediate action. By 06:30 all ground forces in Task Force Vierra were ready to enter the DMZ and 15 minutes later 20 UH-1 Hueys supported by eight Cobra gunships were ready to support the operation.

At 06:45 the Task Force Commander gave a message to the Joint Security Officer to be handed to the KPA counterpart which read: "At 07:00 a United Nation Command work force will enter the Joint Security Area to complete the task begun on Wednesday. Should there be no interference, the work will be complete and the work force will leave".

Three minutes later the first eleven moved out. Twelve minutes later at 07:00 hours the Task Force had entered the JSA and moved directly to the tree. The engineers began to trim the tree one limb at a time. Sixty-four ROKA Special Force soldiers formed a ring around the tree as first line of defense. These soldiers were all black-belts in taekwondo or judo and President Park Chung Hee committed these warriors with the statement, "If the

North Koreans show up with their weapons, these soldiers could disarm and beat them with their own weapons". One JSA Security Platoon had moved into position armed with pick ax handles. The 1953 Armistice Agreement limited the number of weapons in the JSA and UNC lived by the agreement. The first element with weapons was the Reconnaissance Company which was located just outside of the JSA in a woodline where they could support the operation. One minute away by air were 140 soldiers from Bravo and Charlie Companies who were ready to add their firepower if needed. One truck was parked at the eastern end of the Bridge of No Return to block any KPA effort to interfere with the tree cutting. Poplar trees are very sappy and the operators had a difficult time cutting through the branches as each chain saw would be gummed up. In addition, it was almost impossible to get the proper cutting angle to prevent the limb from bearing down on the saw. Within 45 minutes upon entering the JSA the Task Force had removed the illegal barriers built by the KPA and completed the tree cutting mission initiated one week earlier. Once the mission had been accomplished the ROKA Special Forces soldiers and the JSA forces left the area, leaving only the stump to remind all who would visit Panmunjeom of the resolve of the UNC to maintain freedom in the Republic of Korea.

After this whole thing and as the UNC Crisis Action Team was developing courses of action and as the combat soldiers were preparing for any possible mission, the 379th meeting was called by the Military Armistice Commission to discuss this matter in proper channels. Talks started on August 19. The Senior Member of the UNC passed a protest to the KPA Representative regarding the murder of the two American officers and requested that the message which demanded a North Korean apology and retribution to the families of the dead officers be given to Kim Il Sung. During the meeting, the North Korean Senior Representative attempted to shift the blame for the Panmunjeom Axe Murder Incident to the UNC as he explained that the deadly axes carried by the work were brought into the JSA in violation of the Armistice. When that effort failed, he attempted to discuss other alleged violations. The UNC was resolved to discuss only the Panmunjeom Axe Murder Incident and related facts. The meeting lasted one hour and 40 minutes with no solutions reached at the conference table.

Immediately after the Operation Paul Bunyan, the KPA Senior Member requested a meeting with the UNC to answer the message presented on August 19, 1976. The North Koreans regretted that the incident occurred. While not a direct apology, the word "regretful" as used in the message that was significant for it is as close as the North Koreans would ever come to an admission on guilt. The response was also unique in that it was devoid the unusual rhetoric that is used by the North Koreans in meetings. In one meeting the United States was referred to as the US Imperialist Aggressor more than 300 times.

A week later an other meeting occurred where the UNC informed the KPA that their message was unsatisfactory and requested that immediate assurances be given that the safety of UNC personnel in the JSA be preserved, that orders guaranteeing their safety be issued to all KPA personnel and that those guards responsible for the murder of the two UNC officers be punished. The KPA proposed that the MDL be used as the line to physically separate military personnel. Neither this meeting concluded with any agreements. Another meeting was convened on August 31, 1976 and details negotiations continued for six sessions concluding in September. Out of these negotiations came the

requirement to form a Joint Survey to redefine the MDL. By defining and marking the MDL, a separation of the security forces of each side could be assured and the probability of confrontation within the JSA is reduced.

By September 16, 1976, the work to remark the MDL and remove the four KPA guard posts had been completed. Engineers and work parties from both sides constructed the markers and poured concrete to mark their respective portions of the MDL. Meanwhile the KPA personnel removed the four guard posts on the UNC side of the MDL.

With the work complete and the MDL defined, members of the opposing sides are restrained from entering the other side's buildings and crossing the MDL except under very strict conditions. In order to accomplish this, the KPA were compelled to find a different entrance to the JSA as their customary route carried them across the Bridge of No Return into South Korea en route to their place of duty north the MDL. A second bridge was constructed in 72 hours (its name is in fact 72- Hour Bridge) to enable the KPA guards to enter the JSA without violating the new agreement.

The North Korean Government had received a political black eye during this incident and was humiliated as it merely observed the UNC Task Force cut down the internationally famous tree and removed the illegal road barriers that had been in place since 1965.

Apparently the North perceived it to be in their best interest to resolve the matter quickly and that the risk of further confrontation or provocation was too high even greater loss of prestige was probable.

The determination and resolve demonstrated by the soldiers, sailors and airmen of Operation Paul Bunyan earned the respect of the entire world. Their willingness to take the necessary risks and to perform their duty in a professional matter enabled the UNC to reestablish its rights of movement in the JSA. The division of the JSA was designed to prevent further incident inside of the boundary of this explosive site, the DMZ. It was less than a decade later when another serious incident happened at Panmunjeom despite the separation between the opposing forces. On November 23, 1984, a Russian who was touring Panmunjeom on a North Korea sponsored tour bolted from his group and ran to freedom in the South. Twenty to thirty KPA guards opened fire and ran across the MDL in an effort to prevent the defection. The quick thinking of the UNC guards on duty saved the life of the defector, but the gunfire exchange resulted in the death of one Republic of Korea soldier and three KPA guards.

Lt. General Maxwell D. Taylor, Commanding General Eighth United States Army on the occasion of the July 27, 1953 Armistice signing stated:

“There is no occasion for celebration or boisterous conduct. We are faced with the same enemy, only a short distance away, and must be ready for any move he makes”.

These words are as appropriate today just as they were in 1953.

Today all soldiers on the Frontier of Freedom are performing their duties in a professional manner and are prepared for any unpredictable action. Despite all the provocations to war by the North since 1953, the Peninsula is at peace. The efforts of the Republic of Korea and the United States forces will maintain this peace and keep the Armistice in effect until the Korean War is finally ended.

Chapter 3: Why is North Korea still alive?

The development of relations between the two Koreas

The Korean division has just approached its sixth decade. The Republic of Korea (RoK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remain locked in a surprisingly persistent cold war struggle. Although most observers would conclude that North Korea has 'lost' the competition by almost any metric - most obviously, economic performance - Relations between the two are poor, erratic, and prone to crisis. The demilitarized zone dividing them remains, ironically, the most militarized place on earth with roughly two million soldiers and tens of thousands of tanks, rockets, and artillery within 75 miles on either side. The Cold War divided several nations into competing states – Korea, Germany, Vietnam, China, Yemen. In each case, a broad sense of underlying national-cultural unity was maintained in the face of an 'artificial' political separation. Unification was to take place at some point in the future. The unstated assumption was that one political model would 'out-race' the other, highlighting the other's obsolescence and triggering unification. This roughly occurred in Germany and Vietnam. This too is the case in Korea. It is the root of the widespread expectation that North Korea will one day collapse and that the RoK will extend its jurisdiction over the entire peninsula. Conversely, no one plausibly believes that Northern-led unification is a possibility any longer. Even North Korea itself admits that South Korea has outperformed it economically. The Korean race is all but over. So Pyongyang's primary interest today is to forestall unification - to protect the North Korea elite deeply implicated in human rights abuses and corruption - despite pro-forma declarations that it still seeks unity.

The cause is South Korea's tremendous economic performance. With just fifty million people, it is today the world's thirteenth largest economy and member of the G-20. It overcame crushing, third-world levels of poverty in the 1950s. For a brief period, until the late '60s, NK did outgrow SK, and Northern-led unification seemed possible after the US defeat in Vietnam. NK's long-serving first leader, Kim Il-Sung, even asked at the Soviet Union and China at the time for support for a second unification war. But all such talk faded by the 1980s. NK had begun to stagnate as its Soviet sponsor was doing. SK began to seriously pull-away, questioning for the first time the legitimacy of NK's very existence. NK's existence as a communist state was premised ideologically on its ability to deliver better, or at least, fairer, economic growth than SK. By the 1980s this was clearly untrue, and the North Korean population increasingly knew that too. The disappearance of the Soviet Union worsened the economic stagnation; NK turned to be far more dependent on Soviet credit and concessionary fuel than outsiders realized. The end of the cold war era signified a major disturbance for North Korea, inhibiting economic growth and forcing diplomatic isolation. To Pyongyang, all its allies, including China, betrayed its trust. Pyongyang lost its support system in the international community so abruptly that it had no time to make gradual adjustments. To ride the wave of socialist change was not an option for North Korea. Such a course of action could have meant the demise of the system itself, as it would have been forced to compete with the Seoul regime on terms vastly advantageous to the South. By the time Beijing chose to establish diplomatic relations with

Seoul in 1992, Pyongyang felt a deep sense of isolation and the need to be even more resolute in protecting its national identity. This led the regime to accelerate the course of ideological purification along the line of an antithesis to capitalist consumerism and socialist revisionism. The crisis of the 1990s worsened with the death of Kim Il-Sung in 1994 and transfer of leadership to his untested son, Kim Jong-Il. Jong-Il, fearful of his position, elevated the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA) to a unique role (the 'military first' policy). The KPA has since systematically stripped resources from the civilian economy and the onset of a series of bad harvests in turn generated an unprecedented famine. Estimates range as high as three million deaths, which would exceed 10% of the population. As the post-cold war era matured, NK was increasingly seen as a dangerous, bizarre anachronism, forcing Pyongyang into ever more complex contortions to justify its own continuing existence. Pyongyang has never forgotten the stark reality that the Korean War has never ended, but is in a state of temporary truce. The continuing presence of U.S. forces in South Korea, including some 35,000 ground-troops, is keenly felt in North Korea as a formidable and direct threat to the security of the region. The annual military exercises by the joint forces of the United States and South Korea, termed Team Spirit, cause utmost alertness throughout the country. Professor Han S. Park witnessed more than once as the entire city of Pyongyang mobilized to a state of war whenever a Team Spirit exercise was in progress, paralyzing the entire city. Functions and activities at work places, private homes, and public buildings all ceased as though the country was on the verge of being attacked.

The combined impact of these overlapping crises and SK's clear economic superiority was to throw NK into a permanent legitimacy crisis. Why did NK even exist anymore, when a wealthy, healthy, prosperous Korean alternative existed right next door? The long-standing ideological reason for NK's existence – the Cold War - was now gone; Germany, Korea's most obvious parallel of cold war division, was unified. Like East Germany, NK was poorer, less educated, growing more slowly, corrupt, badly administered, and Orwellian. East Germany's demise was welcomed, as would be NK's. Predictions were common in the 1990s that NK would implode soon. In South Korea, a policy of détente – the Sunshine Policy – was adopted in the late 1990s to coax (seemingly) collapsing NK into the global post-cold war system.

Three elements for North Korea's survival

I meanly found three reasons that can somehow explain why North Korea is still there.

- The emergence of the Kim Monarchy: the North Korea response to its dramatic reversal of fortune in the 1990s was increasingly turn regime ideology from Marxism to racist nationalism and a theocratic cultism of the Kim family. Despite the formal DPRK commitment to unification with the South, the regime likely does not want unity. NK is likely the world's worst human rights abuser. The human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) has remained dire under the control of Kim Jong-Un. The government is controlled by a one-party monopoly and dynastic leadership that do not tolerate pluralism and systematically denies basic freedoms. Tight controls on North Korea's border with China continued in 2014, further

reducing the number of North Koreans able to flee and seek refuge in third countries. A Commission of Inquiry (COI) established by the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), chaired by retired Australian judge Michael Kirby, published a devastating report in February 2014 that concluded that the North Korea government has committed systematic human right abuses at a scale without parallel in the contemporary world—including extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions, and other sexual violence. North Korea has ratified four key international human rights treaties and signed, but not yet ratified, another, and has a constitution that provides a number of rights protections on paper. But in practice, the government is among the most rights-repressing in the world. Political and civil rights are nonexistent since the government quashes all forms of disfavored expression and opinion and totally prohibits any organized political opposition, independent media, free trade unions, or civil society organizations. Religious freedom is systematically repressed. As such it is likely that Korean unification would lead to widespread calls for the prosecution of the Pyongyang elite. That interwoven clique of top KPA brass, high officials in the communist party (the Korean Workers' Party), and loyalists of the Kim family are all broadly complicit in the network of gulags, torture, and orwellian surveillance and indoctrination for which NK is notorious. Unification scenarios inevitably require the loosening of the NK police state in exchange for Southern assistance. It is simply impossible to imagine SK, an established democracy, becoming more authoritarian to accommodate Pyongyang, and NK needs Southern assistance, not vice versa. NK must therefore continually manufacture crises by which to justify its increasingly inexplicable existence, and it must re-invent itself ideologically now that communism is passé. This is also the thrust behind the strongly anti- American ideology of the regime. Without tension with its neighbors, NK cannot explain to its own people why they are so much poorer than their Southern cousins.

- The Chinese Patron: another element in the prevention of unification is Chinese support. The retraction of Soviet support in the early 1990s hit North Korea hard, accelerating the slide into the late 90s famine. Under liberal presidents in SK from 1998-2008, SK assistance helped prop-up the regime. But this 'Sunshine Policy' raised significant expectations in the South that NK would change in response to this assistance. But changing the DPRK too much threatens the very existence of NK, and more importantly the Pyongyang elite that benefits from the current arrangement. If NK becomes just another state, akin to an emerging economy with an IMF program and so on, rather than a unique Korean nationalist monarchy, then there is no reason for it to continue to be. In the end, 'Sunshine Policy' failed, because NK cannot change too much or it will accelerate its own demise. By 2007, South Korean voters saw this and elected a conservative, as they did again in 2012. This has pushed NK into the arms of the Chinese. The US and Japan both offered aid in exchange for change at various time in the last twenty-five years, but NK cheated too often on such deals for them to return. This leaves only China, which has gained increasing leverage over NK. While this is better than US, SK, or Japanese aid with serious political conditions attached, it is still not ideal. There is a fairly wide consensus in Korean studies that if China pulls the plug, NK will undergo a severe systemic crisis. Indeed, it's likely that NK could not survive a

Chinese withdrawal. Luckily, China values NK as a buffer. Beijing fears a larger, wealthier, democratic, nationalist united Korea. It also fears that a unified Korea would remain a US ally, as unified Germany has done. This could then lead to the stationing of US forces near the Chinese border, and this was, of course, the issue that provoked Chinese intervention in the Korean war in 1950. Until China changes its threat evaluation of the US, NK is relatively secure. Nonetheless, the Northern nuclear program also helpfully serves to prevent Chinese political domination even as the alliance leads to a subtle Chinese take-over of the Northern economy.

- “Nation’s Life”: this is the way North Korea called its nuclear weapons; this statement was released through the official Korean Central News Agency. It followed a meeting of the Workers' Party that had been presided over by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in March 2013. North Korea's nuclear weapons are a "treasure" not to be traded for "billions of dollars," the statement said. They "are neither a political bargaining chip nor a thing for economic dealings." Pyongyang justifies its own nuclear pursuit in large part on that perceived U.S. threat. The nuclear program serves to both justify North Korea’s post-communist existence and to deter SK and American intervention. Pyongyang routinely asserts that the United States pursues a ‘hostile policy’ toward it. And indeed the US has wavered for decades on whether to pursue normalization – including recognition of NK and acceptance of its right to exist – or regime change. George W. Bush, most famously, demanded regime change in placing NK on its ‘axis of evil.’ SK too goes back and forth on whether to strike a long-term deal with NK for peaceful coexistence, or to push for the final collapse of NK and ultimate unification. The previous president of SK was a strong hawk, while the current one sends mixed signals of accommodation. Nuclear weapons are therefore a powerful deterrent. They make the costs of US-SK regime change unbearable. A Northern nuclear strike on the Southern capital, Seoul, would be catastrophic, so Northern security is dramatically enhanced. Nukes also enhance the prestige of the state. NK, a small, poor, half-country, nonetheless built these elite weapons which allows the DPRK to stand tall against the South, the Americans, Japanese, and Chinese. Hence, Kim Jong-Un called, as said, the North’s nuclear program the ‘life of the nation’.

Conclusions

The Korean War, occurred between 1950-53, drew many nations' attention to the small peninsula. In those years the world was suffering from the aftermath of the Second World War and eventually converging into another conflict, the Cold War. The Korean War is the biggest war that occurred just after WWII, and it wasn't just a conflict between two nations, as it was a bigger confrontation between two ideological thoughts that were dividing the world: the communist system and the capitalism system on the other side. The war broke out on June 25th 1950, when the North decided to move beyond the 38th parallel border; in the beginning communist troops seemed to be unstoppable, but as soon as the americans decided to enter the game next to South Korea, the war took a different draw. The parties kept on fighting and conquering each other's territories, proceeding and withdrawing. The war settled in summer 1951 along the original border. After almost two years of negotiations the Armistice was signed on July 27, 1953. The creation of the DMZ, the demilitarized zone, can be seen as the bankruptcy of talks since it shows the deep division that has to be kept. The two nations don't really have an interest in reunifying their country; on one side we have the North Korean regime and élite, involved in many human rights abuses and not interested at all in loosing their power and their status. On the other hand we have South Korea, a country that has overtaken the North in many different aspects, first of all under an economic point of view.

The two countries keep on living as if they still were living in the Cold War era, keeping the other part under tight control in order to prevent any circumstance that could develop in a dangerous way. What North Korea called "nation's life", its nuclear weapons, is the main threat that South Korea is living in this period. But in history many accidents have occurred between the two nations, especially along the border which divides them since 1953. The Quite War that took place between 1966-69 is a clear demonstration of how sick and weak the relationships between them are; luckily we haven't faced any other such serious event in the last two decades, but feelings between them are everything but optimist.

Reading papers, documents and books about the Korean War and about how relations developed through the years was very interesting; I was especially shocked in getting to know how prisoners were treated during the war, and how the people of Korea were forced to live under a regime of war that lasted for three years. Many nations participated to the war under the United Nations flag, and even tough they belonged to different cultures and nations they all managed to live together and support each other during those hard times. With the Korean War we could see for the first time the meaning and the aim of the United Nations working to keep peace, promoting human rights and providing humanitarian aid in the case of an armed conflict. And this may be the only positive aspect of the Korean War, the beginning and the statement of a new world order that is overseen by this international organization that wants to keep peace and avoid war; the system is not perfect and much has still to be done before the world will face peace in every corner, but we may be on the right way.

Abstract

Il lavoro tratta della Guerra di Corea, argomento a cui è dedicato tutto il primo capitolo; procede poi con la spiegazione nel secondo capitolo su che cosa sia la DMZ e l'analisi di alcuni degli eventi più importanti legati a questa zona demilitarizzata tra le due Coree che è paradossalmente la zona più militarizzata del pianeta; infine, nel terzo capitolo, è studiato lo sviluppo delle relazioni tra le due Coree ed infine cerco di capire quali siano state le cause più rilevanti che han fatto sì che la Corea del Nord sia l'unico stato comunista sopravvissuto.

Così, per introdurre il contesto storico che precede la Guerra del 1950-53, si può cominciare con la dichiarazione del Cairo del dicembre 1943 da parte degli Alleati (Gran Bretagna, Cina e Stati Uniti), la quale sancì che la Corea sarebbe stata liberata dall'occupazione giapponese e che sarebbe diventata uno Stato indipendente dopo un periodo di "supporto". Nonostante il presidente americano Franklin Roosevelt avesse in realtà piani diversi per la Corea, i coreani dal canto loro interpretarono il periodo di "supporto" come "quando la guerra nel Pacifico finirà e i giapponesi se ne saranno andati". Purtroppo per i coreani la realtà fu ben differente da come se l'erano aspettata: gli americani, con il consenso dei sovietici, optarono per dividere la Corea lungo il 38esimo parallelo in due stati ognuno dei quali si ritrovò sotto l'influenza di una delle due superpotenze che segnarono il regime di perenne confronto nel periodo della guerra fredda. Inoltre, non rientrava nei piani degli americani fare della Corea del Sud uno stato completamente indipendente subito dopo la liberazione dal Giappone. Roosevelt voleva inserire la Corea in un patto di alleanza sotto la supervisione americana per un periodo di circa 35 anni dopo la liberazione giapponese.

Il Generale John R. Hodge, comandante delle forze armate americane in Corea, organizzò il governo delle armate militari delle Nazioni Unite e mise il Sud Corea sotto il controllo americano. I coreani rimasero assai delusi da questa decisione e presto i sentimenti ottimisti che s'erano venuti a creare nei confronti degli americani dopo l'intervento in guerra e il loro impegno contro i giapponesi svanirono.

La neonata Repubblica di Corea, lanciata in un mare turbolento, visse tempi burrascosi nei suoi primi anni. La minaccia principale veniva dalla nascita della sua gemella del Nord, ove si impose subito un governo comunista che mirava a riunificare l'intera penisola. Questo confronto culminò nella Guerra di Corea (1950-53), che fu non solo il primo scontro armato nel contesto della guerra fredda, ma anche il primo scontro che seguì la seconda guerra mondiale.

Nonostante l'esplicita richiesta da parte del governo sudcoreano agli americani di mantenere le loro truppe in loco per un periodo più lungo, gli americani le ritirarono nell'estate del 1949, lasciando le truppe coreane senza un adeguato equipaggiamento militare e senza un'adeguata preparazione tecnica a difendere la appena ottenuta indipendenza; solo 500 consiglieri americani restarono in Sud Corea. L'Unione Sovietica, dal canto suo, fornì la Corea del Nord di una gran quantità di mezzi militari pesanti (tra cui più di 500 carro armati e 200 MiG 15) prima che le proprie truppe lasciassero in paese. Inoltre più di 2500 consiglieri militari restarono per addestrare la maggior parte delle truppe comuniste nordcoreane. Tutto ciò ingigantì la minaccia del Nord che mirava ad invadere per inglobare la Corea del Sud. Così il 25 luglio del 1950 l'esercito comunista invase con un buon piano il Sud. Le truppe attraversarono il 38esimo parallelo ed entro quattro giorni avevano conquistato la capitale del Sud, Seul, per poi dilagare sempre più a sud. L'attacco dei comunisti spinse il presidente americano Truman a inviare le proprie truppe per intervenire a sostegno della Corea del Sud; il tutto senza nemmeno chiedere il consenso al Consiglio di Sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite. Così le truppe americane, sotto la bandiera

delle Nazioni Unite e insieme a quelle sudcoreane, organizzarono la controffensiva che partì dalla regione sud-orientale del Paese, il Busan. Nel frattempo altri paesi inviarono le proprie truppe in sostegno della Corea del Sud in quanto il Consiglio di Sicurezza condannò la Corea del Nord come aggressore: furono 15 i paesi che inviarono sostegno militare. A capo delle forze Unite fu nominato il generale americano MacArthur. Una volta pronti partì la controffensiva: il 15 settembre un attacco a sorpresa fu organizzato con uno sbarco nei pressi della città di Incheon; da lì le truppe alleate isolarono le forze comuniste nel sud che furono massacrate. Il 28 settembre Seul fu riconquistata, ma la cosa più grave fu che il Consiglio di Sicurezza autorizzò le proprie forze ad attraversare il 38esimo parallelo: il 19 ottobre conquistano la capitale Pyongyang e dilagano ancora più a nord arrivando quasi fino al confine cinese. Il collasso nordcoreano era imminente, ma a metà ottobre un esercito di circo 180'000 "volontari" cinesi (così li definì Mao) entrò in gioco dalla Manciuria dando il via ad una guerra del tutto nuova. La situazione si ribaltò nuovamente: i comunisti fecero arretrare le forze Alleate e riuscirono persino ad oltrepassare il 38esimo parallelo entrando ancora una volta a Seul il 4 gennaio 1951. Gli Alleati reagirono e a marzo riconquistarono le zone perse cacciando oltre il 38esimo parallelo i comunisti. Da qui si venne a creare una situazione di stallo che ricordò molto la guerra di posizione già conosciuta durante la prima guerra mondiale. A questo punto furono avviati i primi tentativi di colloquio per raggiungere un accordo di pace. Ma i colloqui durarono molto più del previsto; il problema principale era che le parti non riuscivano a trovare un accordo sullo scambio dei prigionieri di guerra. Nel frattempo la guerra continuava, le condizioni di vita, d'igiene e psicologiche dei soldati nel frattempo peggiorarono, e fu in questi anni di stallo che entrambe le parti conobbero le maggiori perdite. I negoziati ottennero una svolta decisiva quando nel marzo 1953 Stalin morì. Da quel momento furono superati lentamente tutti gli ostacoli che bloccavano le trattative. L'armistizio fu finalmente firmato il 27 luglio 1953. Uno dei punti fondamentali fu la creazione di una zona di demilitarizzazione ampia 4 km che aveva la funzione di fare da zona cuscinetto tra le due Coree. La guerra causò la morte di circa 4 milioni di persone per giungere alla stessa situazione antecedente il conflitto. La guerra si concluse sì con la firma dell'armistizio, ma la firma di un vero trattato di pace non è ancora arrivato nonostante sia atteso da ormai più di sessant'anni.

Il lavoro procede con un'analisi piuttosto specifica di come sia strutturata la DMZ: all'interno di questa zona cuscinetto, venutasi a creare dopo la firma dell'armistizio del 1953, vige un regime super rigido di comportamento (numero di persone che possono transitare, quanti sono i soldati che possono stare all'interno, che tipo di equipaggio di tipo militare può transitare ecc). Sono due gli avvenimenti che ho deciso di studiare: il primo è la cosiddetta "Quite War", ovvero la Guerra "Calma", in quanto nel periodo 1966-69 le forze sudcoreane, insieme a quelle americane, combatterono una guerra non dichiarata lungo tutta la DMZ contro le forze nordcoreane. Nel 1969 i nordcoreani abbatterono un aereo americano causando la più grave perdita americana dalla guerra del 1950-53; fu persino definita da Kissinger la prima grave crisi della nuova amministrazione Nixon. Il neopresidente visse momenti difficili in cui doveva prendere una grande decisione, ma alla fine optò per non entrare in guerra contro la Corea del Nord dato gli enormi sforzi che gli americani stavano sostenendo nella Guerra del Vietnam. Il secondo evento analizzato è il famoso assassinio con ascia verificatosi nel 1976 sempre nella DMZ, che vide due comandanti americani assassinati a colpi d'ascia da un gruppo di soldati nordcoreani perché stavano cercando di tagliare un albero che impediva loro la vista sul ponte di accesso alla Corea del Nord.

Nell'ultimo capitolo si analizza come si sono sviluppate le relazioni tra i due paesi: queste sono purtroppo rimaste scarse, come se vivessero ancora nel periodo della guerra fredda; la DMZ resta la zona più militarizzata al mondo dove tutt'oggi si respira un'aria di tensione permanente. La guerra fredda ha visto diversi paesi divisi (Vietnam, Germania, lo Yemen e la Corea stessa), ma tra tutti solo le due Coree non sono ancora state unite; storicamente

ci si poteva aspettare una riunificazione prima o poi, il prevalere di uno dei due modelli sull'altro, così come è avvenuto in Germania dove lo spirito patriottico e nazionalista ha fatto sì che l'unificazione arrivasse. Nel caso delle Coree invece questo non è avvenuto. Ho individuato tre fattori determinanti che secondo la mia opinione impediscono questa fusione: l'emergere della dinastia Kim e la divinizzazione della figura del leader, trasformando negli anni '90 il regime comunista quasi in una teocrazia; ed è proprio negli interessi dell'élite nordcoreana non riunificare i due paesi, essendo questi coinvolti in un altissimo numero di casi di violazione dei diritti umani. Il secondo motivo di sopravvivenza è riconducibile alla presenza cinese, i quali hanno deciso di appoggiare il regime dopo che negli anni '90 fu "abbandonato" dai russi. Il terzo fattore sono invece le di armi di distruzione di massa che il regime ha fortemente voluto come deterrente, come se volesse sfidare il resto del mondo a porre fine alla sua esistenza.

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