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"Command Crisis: MacArthur and the Korean War,"

D. Clayton James, November 12, 1981

When General of the Army Douglas MacArthur delivered his moving address before the joint session of Congress on April 19, 1951, I was watching and listening with bated breath before a television set in a room packed with excited college students at Southwestern-at-Memphis. Most of us were convinced at the time that President Harry S. Truman was a foolish politician who had dared to rush in where the Joint Chiefs of Staff had feared to tread. It seemed to us that the most momentous issues since World War II were at stake in the President's relief of the general. The torrent of abusive mail that Truman received, the charges by otherwise responsible public leaders that the President was guilty of offenses just short of treason but deserving impeachment, the tumultuous welcome accorded MacArthur upon his return, the lengthy and sometimes dramatic Senate hearings on his relief from command, the gradual shift in public support from MacArthur to Truman as the testimony continued into June 1951, and the countless arguments in newspapers and magazines, as well as over television and radio, on whether the President or the general had been right- all this surely demonstrated the crucial nature of the Truman MacArthur controversy to those of us who lived through this great excitement of 1951.

In the hearings before the Senate's Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees in the late spring and early summer of 1951, two issues of the dispute emerged as dominant and have remained so in most later writings about the episode: MacArthur's alleged challenges to the strategy of limited warfare in Korea and to the hallowed principle of civilian supremacy over the military. American history textbooks for high school and college students may abbreviate or ignore many aspects of the Korean War but it would be difficult to find one that does not emphasize the Truman-MacArthur confrontation as a major crisis of that period. Disappointingly few scholarly works on the subject range beyond the supposed threats to limited-war strategy and civil-military relations. In their efforts to show that the Korean War was instigated by South Korean aggressors or American imperialists, the New Left historians so far have not paid much heed to the affair.

The notion that the Truman-MacArthur controversy was rooted in disagreement over whether the Korean conflict should be kept a limited war is a myth that needs to be laid to rest. Many contemporary and later critics of MacArthur cleverly employed the false-dilemma argument, presenting the case as if only two alternatives existed- World War III or the war with the limitations that actually evolved. But other alternatives may have existed, including controlled escalation that might have prevented a frustrating stalemate and yet might not have provoked the Soviet Union into entering the fray. MacArthur surely desired escalation but only against the nations already at war against South Korea and the United Nations Command. At various times he requested permission to allow his aircraft to enter Manchurian air space to pursue enemy planes and bomb their bases, to attack bridges and hydroelectric plants along the Yalu River, to blockade Communist China's coast and conduct naval and air bombardments against its industrial centers, and to use

Nationalist Chinese troops in Korea or in limited assaults against the Chinese mainland. But all such requests were peremptorily rejected, and MacArthur retreated from each demand. He simply had no other recourse; disobedience would have meant his instant removal, as he well understood. It is interesting that in their deliberations on these proposals by MacArthur, the Joint Chiefs either turned them down because they were tactically unsound and logically unfeasible or postponed a decision until further consideration. In truth, most of MacArthur's requests for escalation could not have been effectively executed. Not until their testimony before the Senate committees after MacArthur's relief did the Joint Chiefs assert that their main reason for rejecting MacArthur's proposals was that their implementation might have started a new global war.

Contrary to persisting popular belief, MacArthur never advocated an expansion of the land war into Manchuria or North China. He abhorred the possibility of a war with the Soviet Union as much as did his superiors in Washington. While the latter viewed the North Korean invasion as Moscow-directed and anticipated a massive Soviet response if MacArthur's proposed actions were tried, MacArthur did not believe the Soviet Union would become involved on a large scale in order to defend North Korea or Communist China. In view of the Sino-Soviet conflict that erupted not long after the Korean War, who is to say, especially with the sparse Western sources on strategic planning in Moscow and Peking, that MacArthur was altogether wrong?

No matter what MacArthur might have advocated in the way of escalation, the President and his military and foreign policy advisers were firmly committed to keeping the war limited because they were more concerned with a potential Soviet armed incursion into Western Europe. Washington focused on implementing the overall military build-up called for in the NSC-68 document of early 1950 and on quickly organizing deterrent forces under the NATO aegis. Knowing this and realizing it was unlikely that he would receive further reinforcements in Korea, MacArthur would have to have been stupid, which he was not, to nourish dreams of ground offensives above the Yalu, as some of his detractors have claimed.

MacArthur was not involved in the decision making responsible for unleashing the United Nations forces' invasion of North Korea, which, in turn, brought Communist China into the conflict—the only two significant escalations of the Korean War. MacArthur's troops crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea on October 1, 1950, only after he had received a Joint Chiefs' directive four days earlier authorizing such a move. And on October 7, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that, in essence, called for the reunification of Korea by force. In many works, even textbooks that our youth must study, MacArthur is still portrayed as unilaterally deciding to conquer North Korea. In truth, MacArthur merely executed the policy made in Washington to seize North Korea, which turned out to be perhaps the most important decision of the war and produced the only escalation that brought a new belligerent into the conflict. For the decision makers behind this startling change in policy, one must look to Washington, not Tokyo. In summing up this point, the Truman-MacArthur controversy, as far as strategic differences were concerned, was not a real disagreement on whether the war should be limited, only on how it should be done.

The other persisting notion is that MacArthur's actions produced a crisis in American civil-military relations. But he actually was not an "American Caesar" and was not interested in spearheading a move to overturn the long-established principle of civilian supremacy over the military, which, with his masterful knowledge of

American military history, he knew was strongly rooted and widely endorsed by the people. There is no question that he issued public statements sharply critical of the Truman administration's military and foreign policies and expressly violated the Joint Chiefs' directive of December 6, 1950, requiring theater commanders to obtain clearance from the Department of Defense on statements related to military affairs and from the Department of State on releases bearing on foreign policy. His defiance was also manifest when on March 24, 1951, he issued unilaterally a surrender ultimatum to the Communist Chinese commander after having just been informed by Washington that the State Department was beginning diplomatic overtures that could lead to truce negotiations. But MacArthur's disobedience and arrogant gestures were a far cry from constituting a threat to the American system of civil-military order.

To call a spade a spade, MacArthur was guilty of insubordination toward his Commander in Chief, and therefore he was relieved, though perhaps belatedly and certainly rudely. General of the Army George C. Marshall, then Secretary of Defense, explained it in straightforward terms at the Senate hearings:

It is completely understandable and, in fact, at times commendable that a theater commander should become so wholly wrapped up in his own aims and responsibilities that some of the directives received by him from higher authority are not those that he would have written himself. There is nothing new about this sort of thing in our military history. What is new, and what has brought about the necessity for General MacArthur's removal, is the wholly unprecedented situation of a local theater commander publicly expressing his displeasure at and his disagreement with the foreign and military policy of the United States.¹

The President himself said in his memoirs that "MacArthur left me no choice- I could no longer tolerate his insubordination."² Probably the major reason MacArthur was not court-martialed stemmed from Truman's weak political base at the time. In short, an officer disobeyed and defied his superior and was relieved of command. The principle of civilian control over the military was not seriously threatened by MacArthur's statements and actions; the President's exercise of his power as Commander in Chief should have made it clear that the principle was still safe and healthy.

If not limited-war strategy or a civil-military crisis, then what was the fundamental issue at stake in the Truman-MacArthur controversy? In essence, it was a crisis in command that stemmed from failures in communication and coordination within the chain of command and was exacerbated by an unprecedented political-social phenomenon called McCarthyism.

The failure in communication between Truman and MacArthur was due, in part, to the absence of any personal contact with each other prior to their brief and only meeting at Wake Island on October 15, 1950, and to the stereotypes each had accepted of the other based primarily on the views of their respective confidants. In his reminiscences and elsewhere Truman admits that he was miffed by the general's rejection of his invitation at the end of World War II to return home and receive the customary hero's welcome and visit at the White House. Truman had also expected to confer with MacArthur on issues in Japan when various congressional committees in 1946-48 requested his personal testimony, but each time the general remained in Tokyo, claiming that the pressures of occupation matters prevented him from returning to the States.

In his rise in politics, Truman had carefully cultivated a public image of himself as a representative of the common man. Unassuming and possessing a down-to-earth friendliness, he was completely without pose and affectation. As President, he continued without inhibition his poker and piano playing, bourbon drinking, and, when aroused, profuse cursing. Many people were deceived into thinking that this "little man" who spoke with a Missouri twang and dressed like a Main Street shopkeeper was not up to the demands of the nation's highest office and surely was not able to walk in the footsteps of Woodrow Wilson or Franklin D. Roosevelt in providing dynamic leadership. MacArthur and his GHQ confidants in Tokyo since 1945 had accepted this impression and had never had the personal connections with Truman necessary to disabuse them or to discover that the real Truman was a shrewd, intelligent, and skilled political master who, as chief executive, could be as aggressive and tough as necessary. And they did not learn that Truman's public image and the actual person meshed when it came to at least one important trait: his deep-seated contempt for pretension and arrogance.

While MacArthur and his Tokyo entourage underestimated Truman as a decisive leader, the President, at least until the autumn of 1950, held considerable respect for the general. After all, it was Truman who appointed him as supreme commander in Japan in 1945 and as head of the United Nations Command in the Korean conflict. Truman's earliest impressions of MacArthur derived from World War I where MacArthur, already a general officer, had won fame as a bold, courageous combat leader. When Truman came to Washington as senator in 1934, MacArthur was serving as military head of the Army and often was called upon to testify before congressional committees and not infrequently to confer with President Roosevelt. While MacArthur's name was in the headlines many times during World War II, Truman did not really achieve national prominence until his vice-presidential nomination in mid-1944. As President, however; Truman's respectful attitude toward the "Big General," as he sometimes called him, was tempered by his innate dislike of egotistical, aloof, and pretentious persons, among whom MacArthur began to stand out in his mind as the Japanese occupation continued to appear like a one-man act and particularly after the general's thinly disguised bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1948.

The first rounds of the Truman-MacArthur clash began in July-August 1950 with the general's allegedly unauthorized trip to Taiwan and his message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars attacking American policy in the Far East. The final rounds came in late March and early April 1951 with MacArthur's brazen announcement of his terms for a cease-fire and Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin's reading before the House of Representatives a letter from MacArthur critical of the Truman administration's conduct of the war. On April 11, six days after the House heard MacArthur's letter, Truman, upon consulting with the Joint Chiefs and members of the National Security Council, announced the general's removal from his commands. By then Truman had discounted MacArthur's long and sometimes brilliant career, as well as his many positive leadership traits, and was ready to accept the negative side of his public image: the "Beau Brummell" of the A.E.F., the "political general" that F.D.R. in 1932 had paired with Huey Long as "the two most dangerous men in the country," the producer of self-seeking communiques from the Southwest Pacific theater, the "Yankee Shogun" in Japan, and now the haughty, insubordinate theater chief in the frustrating war in Korea. Unlike MacArthur's previous differences with Roosevelt, his confrontation with Truman would not be ameliorated by a long and deep, if enigmatic,

friendship. This time there were no personal ties between the two, and each fell back on misperceptions based on stereotypes of the other. Each man incorrectly judged the other's motivation, and each erroneously estimated the impact of his actions (or lack of actions) upon the other's image of his intentions. The outcome marked the sudden end of MacArthur's career, and the clash played no small part in killing Truman's chance for another term as President.

The Truman-MacArthur relationship vis-a-vis the Korean War started and ended with decisions that might have had happier alternatives. The President's appointment of MacArthur to head the United Nations Command on July 7, 1950, was based largely on the grounds that, as chief of the American Far East Command, he had been handling the piecemeal commitment of American forces to Korea since shortly after the war began two weeks earlier and, as commander over the Japanese occupation, he was in position to prepare Japan as the principal staging base for later operations. But MacArthur was a half year beyond his seventieth birthday and, though not senile or in ill health, was beginning to show natural signs of aging. It was not as if the nation had gone many years without a war and lacked a supply of proven high-level commanders. Truman could have chosen the United Nations commander from a generous reservoir of able officers who had distinguished themselves in World War II, while perhaps leaving MacArthur to continue his direction of the occupation of Japan. Unlike some of the top commanders of the wartime European theater who had been in on the evolution of the containment strategy since 1945, MacArthur had not been in Washington since 1935 and was not acquainted with the twists and turns of Pentagon thinking nor with the officials who had been developing Cold War strategy. From his days as a West Point cadet at the turn of the century onward, MacArthur had been disciplined to think in terms of winning on the battlefield. As he remarked at the Senate hearings, "The only way I know, when a nation wars on you, is to beat her by force."³ In retrospect, then, the first mistake was in selecting MacArthur rather than a younger but fully capable officer who was known to be in accord with current Pentagon strategic thinking, such as Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway.

The Truman-MacArthur affair ended in a manner that surely did not surprise the general for its lack of consideration and tactfulness. However people may differ on the various facets of the controversy, most would agree that the relief of the distinguished old warrior could have been handled in a different manner. Although Truman had intended for Secretary of the Army Frank Pace to interrupt his tour in Korea and bring the orders of relief to MacArthur in Tokyo personally, there were mixups and the general learned of it through a public radio broadcast. Truman's orders stated that MacArthur was relieved immediately of his duties, with Ridgway, head of the Eighth Army in Korea, to succeed him in charge of the United Nations Command, the Far East Command, and the occupation of Japan. Always viewing himself as a soldier-aristocrat and a professional par excellence, MacArthur later opined, "No office boy, no charwoman, no servant of any sort would have been dismissed with such callous disregard for the ordinary decencies."⁴ To him it seemed that a commoner without "breeding" or professional credentials had dismissed an aristocrat and premiere professional. Truman would have missed such nuances, for to him it was simply a matter of the boss firing an unruly, disobedient subordinate. If, as he claimed, Truman lost no sleep over his decision to use atomic bombs in the summer of 1945, it is doubtful that he suffered insomnia after ousting MacArthur.

If lack of effective communication marred the relationship between the President and his theater chief in the Far East, failures in both communication and

coordination flawed relations between the Joint Chiefs and MacArthur, as well as between the Chiefs and the President. In 1950-51 the Joint Chiefs of Staff consisted of General of the Army Omar N. Bradley, Chairman; Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff; and Adm. Forrest P. Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations. All of them had distinguished records from World War II and postwar commands, but none had ever served with or under MacArthur and, like Truman, had only secondary impressions of him- and vice versa. During the planning stage of Operation CHROMITE, the Inchon assault, the Joint Chiefs had been annoyingly conservative in their approach to MacArthur's risky proposal. But with the operation's startling success in mid-September 1950, the Joint Chiefs, along with the new Secretary of Defense, Gen. Marshall, seemed to throw caution to the wind and authorized MacArthur's crossing the 38th parallel into North Korea without assessing the much higher risk factors with the care they had exercised in analyzing the Inchon plan. Indeed, MacArthur was given a virtual free hand in October and November as his forces fanned out across North Korea and pushed toward the Yalu River boundary with Manchuria. In the dazzling light of the Inchon success, few could see that the poorly planned amphibious operation at Wonsan a few weeks later, which logistically crippled the Eighth Army's offensive, may have been more indicative of MacArthur's strategic thinking at this stage than the Inchon assault. But the lessons of Wonsan never seemed to penetrate Washington minds until too late. Besides, the Joint Chiefs and Marshall were probably more absorbed in planning overall rearmament and NATO's new military structure than in what transpired immediately after MacArthur's seemingly decisive triumph over the North Korean Army.

During the advance above the 38th parallel the Joint Chiefs tried to limit MacArthur only to the extent of requiring him to use South Korean units solely in the approach to the Yalu. Armed with an ambiguous message from Marshall that he interpreted as giving him freedom to decide whether American forces should spearhead the advance, MacArthur boldly rejected even this slight attempt at control by the Joint Chiefs. Astonishingly, the Joint Chiefs offered no rejoinder and quietly yielded to the discretion of the theater commander- a practice that had usually been proper in World War II but which would prove disastrous in the Korean War. In an unprecedented conflict like that in 1950, where limited fighting could and did escalate dangerously, the Joint Chiefs should have kept a much shorter leash on their theater commander.

After the initial Chinese attacks of late October and early November there was an ominous lull while MacArthur began preparations for an offensive to consummate the conquest of North Korea and flush out any Chinese volunteer forces. By mid-November the Joint Chiefs and their planners were deeply worried by MacArthur's failure to concentrate his forces: the Eighth Army was heading up the west side of North Korea toward Sinuiju, while the X Corps was pushing to the Chosen Reservoir and northeastward to Chongjin, with a huge gap in the middle between the two forces. Not only the Joint Chiefs but also Marshall, Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson, and National Security Council advisers were becoming alarmed, but none proposed to change MacArthur's directive and none went to Truman to share his anxiety with the Commander in Chief. Since there was no overwhelming evidence on the Peking regime's intentions or the whereabouts of its armies, these key advisers to the President chose not to precipitate a confrontation with MacArthur. Just before MacArthur launched his fateful "end-the-war" offensive on November 24, even Truman

commented, "You pick your man, you've got to back him up. That's the only way a military organization can work."⁵ Actually a revision of MacArthur's directive was urgently needed, but his Washington superiors hesitated because of the intimidating impact of the Inchon "miracle" and because of their outmoded trust in the principle of not reversing a theater or field commander without solid grounds. They were still searching for substantial evidence to do so when the Chinese forces struck in mass shortly after MacArthur's troops had started forward.

There were also problems of coordination between American intelligence outfits, although in most writings on the war MacArthur is held liable for the intelligence blunders that failed to provide the signals of the impending North Korean invasion in late June 1950 and the Chinese intervention that autumn. It is nothing short of astonishing that at the Wake Island conference the President should ask MacArthur whether the Communist Chinese were going to enter the conflict. The general's sadly flawed ego prompted him to respond with some ill-formed remarks reminiscent of his regrettable and uncalled-for comments in 1932 charging that the Bonus Army was a Communist led menace. Actually MacArthur's intelligence staff was responsible only for intelligence concerning the enemy at war; and the opposing belligerent in mid-October was North Korea, not Communist China. Intelligence on the intentions and activities of a nonbelligerent in time of war was the responsibility of the non-military agencies in that field. Yet, inexplicably, no known writings on the war seriously fault either the State Department's intelligence arm or the Central Intelligence Agency. If and when the documents of those agencies for 1950 become available to outside researchers, it is predicted that those two bodies will be judged the chief culprits in the failure to provide advance warning of the North Korean and Red Chinese attacks. All that is now known is that there was little cooperation and coordination between them and MacArthur's intelligence staff, which was headed by Maj. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby, who, in turn, rarely welcomed "outside" opinions. The smoke created by MacArthur's overly confident pronouncements led later writers to anoint him as the scapegoat and hid the lamentable failure to coordinate intelligence data.

The only long-term friend MacArthur had in the Washington "inner circle" in 1950 was Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, but on September 12, 1950, Truman removed him and appointed Marshall in his stead. Despite the fact that Marshall had been MacArthur's immediate superior in World War II and the two had exchanged hundreds of messages on Southwest Pacific plans and operations, they had conferred personally at length only once, when Marshall visited him on Goodenough Island in December 1943. For the most part, Marshall can be excused from blame for the command crisis of 1950-51 because not only was he new to the job but also the role of the Secretary of Defense was not then as clearly defined or powerful as it would later become. Marshall's relations with the Joint Chiefs were close and cordial, no doubt assisted by his close friendships with Bradley and Collins. The Secretary of Defense's chief failure, as mentioned earlier, was shared by his colleagues, namely, failing to insist on closer control over MacArthur after Inchon and not having his directive revised or countermanded once the Chinese made their preliminary move against the United Nations forces in late October. Marshall's most controversial mistake was his message of September 29 to MacArthur stating, "We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38th parallel."⁶ Thereupon MacArthur used this against the Joint Chiefs when they tried to inhibit his employments of units other than South Korean in advancing to the Yalu. It is hoped that Marshall's distinguished biographer, Forrest C. Pogue, will provide in his

forthcoming volume a satisfactory explanation of this action by Marshall that was so uncharacteristic of his dealings with the Joint Chiefs. Whatever Marshall's intentions were, however, his message contributed to the dissonance in the chain of command.

Secretary of State Acheson had a well-known and hearty distaste for MacArthur, though the two were not personally acquainted. The feeling was mutual and began with an exchange of barbs in press statements about the troop strength required in Japan in the fall of 1945. It was hardly coincidental that shortly after Acheson became Secretary of State in 1949 a move was underway in the State Department to try to remove MacArthur as supreme commander in Japan. In September 1950, Truman appointed John Foster Dulles as the chief negotiator of a draft peace treaty for Japan (the final document to be eventually signed a year later); Acheson was not pleased thereafter when Dulles often solicited input from MacArthur. Acheson's role in the Truman-MacArthur controversy appears to have been that of a significant contributor to the President's shift to an almost totally negative image of MacArthur. As arrogant in his own way as MacArthur, Acheson later commented in his book on the Korean War: "As one looks back in calmness, it seems impossible to overestimate the damage that General MacArthur's willful insubordination and incredibly bad judgment did to the United States in the world and to the Truman Administration in the United States."⁷ This is sheer hyperbole as far as MacArthur's lasting impact on world opinion is concerned, though his feud with the President probably did some damage to Truman's political future. What was said in informal talks between Truman and Acheson, who undoubtedly was "on the inside" with the President, cannot be documented precisely, but, in understated language, the secretary's input did not likely contribute to better understanding between Truman and MacArthur. Moreover, Acheson was instrumental in the decision that led to one of the worst blunders of the war in the wake of MacArthur's removal: the indication to North Korea and Red China that the United States was ready to begin negotiations on a truce with a cease-fire line in the proximity of the 38th parallel, while at the time, early June 1951, Ridgway's unit commanders were reporting that Chinese troops were surrendering in unprecedented numbers and that the Communist forces appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

The command crisis at the level of Washington and Tokyo had its counterpart in microcosmic form on the Korean peninsula. There, thanks to an unwise decision by MacArthur, his GHQ chief of staff and crony, Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond, was given command of X Corps, whose operations were independent of Gen. Walton Walker's Eighth Army. Almond and Walker developed a deep-seated animosity toward each other, as did Almond and his main division commander; Maj. Gen. O.P. Smith of the First Marine Division. Apparently MacArthur never became fully aware of the friction and lack of cooperation and coordination between these key field commanders. The results were that MacArthur either was not accurately informed on the situation at the front or received contradictory reports. Even when Ridgway took over the Eighth Army after Walker's death in late December 1950, the channel between MacArthur and his new army commander was not satisfactory, though primarily the fault of the former. MacArthur was still rendering gloomy, alarmist reports to the Joint Chiefs long after Ridgway had turned the Eighth Army around. It is little wonder that Chief of Staff Collins was pleasantly surprised when he visited the Eighth Army's front in mid-January 1951 and found the troops preparing for a major counteroffensive.

Besides the failures in communication and coordination within the chain of command, there were also political factors that impinged upon command relations and decision making. In the November 1950 congressional elections, the Truman administration and the Democratic Party suffered serious reverses that indicated, among other things, considerable voter dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war. The Democratic majority in the Senate dropped from twelve to two, while in the House the Democratic margin was reduced by two-thirds. It has been alleged, and not without some justification, that an important reason for Truman's trip to Wake Island in mid-October had been his desire to identify his administration more amiably with MacArthur, who still enjoyed a large following in the States as a hero and continuing support from a sizable number of conservative Republicans who still hoped to get him into the Oval Office. No scholarly study has been published yet on how much the impending presidential election of 1952 affected the Truman-MacArthur controversy.

Unlike the Second World War, when an earnest, if not altogether successful, effort was made at bipartisanship, the politics of the Korean War were highly partisan. Many Republican leaders felt free to assail savagely the Truman administration's management of the war and, of course, the President's handling of MacArthur. Senator Robert A. Taft, often called "Mr. Republican" by his conservative colleagues, commented after MacArthur's relief that he could no longer trust Bradley's judgment because he allegedly sided with Democrats. The distinguished journalist Walter Lippmann took an unfair slap at the Joint Chiefs when he deplored what he called "the beginning of an altogether intolerable thing in a republic: namely a schism within the armed forces between the generals of the Democratic Party and the generals of the Republican Party."⁸ There is little evidence for such alarm, but political considerations undoubtedly intruded upon the thinking of the main actors in both the Truman and MacArthur camps.

An area that still awaits in-depth research is the impact of McCarthyism on the Truman-MacArthur affair. It seems more than coincidental that Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's ship had already developed a full head of steam when the Truman-MacArthur controversy began and that both phenomena were making headlines in 1951. Unfortunately, my research for the third volume of my biography of MacArthur is not yet complete for this period. The evidence gathered thus far does not indicate any connections between the general and the volatile senator from Wisconsin, except for occasional laudatory remarks by the latter about MacArthur. Both men appeared to draw support from those citizens who were concerned about the loyalty issues, the menace of communism, and the allegedly faltering position of the United States globally that had led to the "loss" of China. Both men were strong on Americanism, though neither lucidly defined it, and both were critical of Truman's Fair Deal as an effort to continue and expand the liberal reforms of Roosevelt's New Deal, though MacArthur's criticism of domestic policies was reserved until after the Senate hearings. Truman surely took the mounting excitement of McCarthyism with more seriousness than he indicated publicly.

Several recent scholarly writings have maintained that the principal reason for Truman's decision to hurl American forces into the gauntlet in Korea in June 1950 was that the President felt compelled politically to demonstrate that his administration, especially in the wake of the ouster of the Nationalists from mainland China, was prepared to act decisively and aggressively against world communism. But if the hypothesis is valid regarding Truman's motivation in this case, it is difficult to explain on similar grounds his relief of MacArthur. While the former action may have stolen

some thunder from Senator McCarthy and his devotees, the latter action provoked their displeasure as well as the wrath of many citizens who had not endorsed McCarthyism. The dismissal of MacArthur still appears as an act of personal courage on Truman's part, taken at considerable political risk to himself. All such observations must be qualified, however; by a reminder that my research on the possible links between McCarthyism and the Truman-MacArthur episode is still underway.

As each year passes, the controversy between the President and the general seems less momentous. It is not likely that it can ever be called a tempest in a teapot, but the question of whether Truman or MacArthur was right no longer appears as important. This is especially true in light of a number of fundamental questions that were not pursued carefully at the time, such as the following: To what extent was the Korean conflict a civil war? Were there signs available during the Korean War that portended the coming Sino-Soviet clash? Was American policy on French Indochina and Formosa significantly altered by Truman's actions in late June 1950 dispatching more military aid to the French and units of the Seventh Fleet to the Formosa Strait? How important is bipartisanship in time of war? Should investigations like the Senate hearings on MacArthur's relief be conducted in the midst of war? Can the will and endurance of a democratic government and society stand the strain of a protracted limited war? Were there flaws in the American command structure that affected the prosecution of the war in Korea and perhaps were carried over into the Vietnam War also?

These and other important questions needed asking in view of the way history unfolded during the ensuing decade, but the publicity and excitement of the Truman-MacArthur controversy drew attention to its relatively less vital questions and shrouded the crisis in command of that era. In closing, I propose that besides the previous questions, one may ponder anew Bradley's famous statement at the 1951 Senate hearings as applicable not only to MacArthur's strategic ideas but also to the sad confrontation between the President and his theater commander. In their lamentable feud that inadvertently served to screen more crucial issues, Truman and MacArthur had been engaged against each other in "fighting in the wrong war; at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy. "⁹

Notes

1. Testimony of Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall, May 7, 1951, in U.S. Senate, Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Military Situation in the Far East: Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eighty-second Congress, First Session, to Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East and the Facts Surrounding the Relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur from His Assignments in That Area* (5 pts. in 2 vols., Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), pt. I, p.325.

2. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, Vol.II: Years of Trial and Hope* (Signet ed., New York: New American Library, 1956), p.501.

3. Testimony of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, May 3, 1951, in U.S. Senate, *Military Situation in the Far East: Hearings, Pt. I*, p.67.

4. Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), p.395.

5. Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), p.128.

6. Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall to General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, September 29, 1950, JCS 92895, RG 218, Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

7. Dean G. Acheson, *The Korean War* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971), p.111.

8. *New York Herald Tribune*, April 30, 1951.

9. Testimony of General of the Army Omar N. Bradley, May 15, 1951, in U.S. Senate, *Military Situation in the Far East: Hearings*, pt. II, p.732.

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