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Printed in Italy in October 1992
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy

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The Korean War as a case-study and some of its Implications for Western Europe - a reappraisal.

ANDREA CAMPANA, EUI

This essay will present and evaluate the most recent interpretations on the Korean War and locate this conflict in the panorama of the Cold War. It will mainly focus on some interesting aspects which have recently come to light after further research. In particular the final section will deal with the way in which the Korean War affected West European security.

The research topics concerning Korea which have been most widely discussed are:

1) North-Korea as part of the monolithic Socialist bloc, and the corollary of this thesis,

revisited;

Korea as a symbol of the American foreign policy;

3) the predominantly civil origins of the war;

4) Korea as a turning point for the global Cold War process.

This paper will comment on all these topics leading, in the last part, to an analysis of the relationships between United States and Great Britain, which was politically the most important European ally. This part will be based on archival material the Public Record Office (PRO) and other British public and private archives.

The Korean War (1950-1953), provoked by the invasion of the South by the North pro-Communist army, was soon internationalized through the intervention of the US army in support of the pro-western South (ROK). It was impossible to set up a UN peace-enforcing corp under the stringent rules of the United Nations Charter, because of the failure of the member states to agree on this topic in 1947-48¹. However a coordinated US/UN intervention, in which United Kingdom played a major part², was made possible in this case (the first UN direct military intervention) thanks to the absence of USSR from the Security Council of the United Nations. The Soviet boycott - in protesting against the absence

¹E. JOHNSON, British Proposals for a United Nations Force, 1946-48, pp. 109-145, in A. DEIGHTON (ed) Britain and the First Cold War, London, MacMillan Press 1990; G. A. CAMPANA, Un fallimento della diplomazia internazionale: l'ONU e la sua forza militare, TESTIMONIANZE, n. 335-336/1991.

²Apart from UK, other European countries present in Korea were: France, Greece, BENELUX.

The Author(s).

of the newly created People's Republic of China (PRC) - was decisive for the veto not being cast.

After some months of military operations, US/UN troops marched north of the 38th parallel, the political boundary in Korea. The arrival of US marines at the border with PRC provoked the Chinese intervention. Thus, a rebalance of the military situation was the basic precondition for the beginning of negotiation for a cease-fire in July 1951. The long dragging pour-parlers ended only two years later, in July, 1953. The division of the peninsula was roughly re-established according the status quo ante. The heavy US involvement³ had not bring out a clear victory. Since 1953 nothing has changed and a peace treaty has not been issued.

For a scholar studying limited conflicts after the II World War, it is striking how detailed the bibliography on Korea is. It has to be noted, however, that the large majority of historians on this subject (as, more generally on the Cold War) are Americans.

Only in the last few years have scholars from other countries, particularly from Great Britain - but also from Korea and Australia, started to furnish very interesting studies, more critical of previous interpretations and paving the way for a new debate. Nevertheless, very important questions such as the domestic situation of the peninsula, the possible use of nuclear devices, and especially the relations between allies have not been discussed deeply.

For many years after the war, only a few orthodox works, not based on primary sources, were available⁴. By 1984 all the American documents on the war were consultable. And in the last ten years European archives have also been opened. However, many scholars refer to the fact that the war is still unknown. Roger Dingman has explained this fact, saying that Korea remained "sandwiched" between the "good war" (the one in the Pacific) and the "bad war" (the one in Vietnam).

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS.

1) North-Korea as part of the monolithic Socialist bloc, and a corollary of this thesis revisited.

The question of the dubious responsibility for the outbreak of the war has faded. The initial and sudden attack was staged by the North koreans. The recurrence of the opposite interpretation in past literature derived from an ideological understanding of the events of the Cold War. Modern historiography seems to have overcome the thesis of a Southern attack, as well as the theory of a pro-American South that instigated the

³In the war some two to three million civilians were killed. US/UN Command dropped 635,000 tons of bombs (503.000 in the whole Pacific scenario in World War II) and 32,557 tons of *napalm*. R. FOOT, A Substitute for Victory, Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1990, p. 208.

⁴E.g., see D. REES, *The Limited War*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1964.

intervention of the Communist North (RDPC), in order to gain American

support⁵.

Merrill's account (1989) of the complete - and various - interpretations given by the Americans (traditionalists and revisionists), by the Socialist historians, by the North Koreans, and even by the Chinese, is today definitive. This debate generally recognizes the historical fact of a sudden invasion operated by the Communist Northern regime6.

Today, the centre of the debate (which will be enhanced by possible documentary revelation from the former Socialist side) focusses on the de facto relationship (political and military) between the regime of Kim Il Sung and that of Peking and/or Moscow. This relationship has had an important impact when considering the possible war by proxy often used by Washington as a propaganda to obtain the rearmament of Western Europe within the framework of NATO.

In particular, this danger was said to be pending on West Germany (who was expected to join the NATO organization), less on the Scandinavian countries (Norway, but also Sweden and Denmark were seen as possible targets), on Yugoslavia and Italy, badly protected by a weak and occupied

Austria, and by the not completely stable Balcans.

It is stated by many authors today that Stalin was fully aware of Kim's intention to unify the peninsula, but what is not clear is the degree of approval accorded by the Soviet dictator, and whether he knew the timing of the Northern initiative⁷. Recently - December, 1990 - Edvard Shevardnaze, at that time USSR Foreign Minister, gave an "official apology" to Roo Tae Woo, the present South Korean President, for the Soviet role in the Korean War, remaining unclear on the precise responsibilities of the Russian government⁸.

Giving different reasons, William Stueck, John Merrill, Zhai Zhihai, Hao Yufan and Andrei Gromiko, in his memories⁹, seem to converge on the conclusion that Stalin was in fact aware of Kim's intention. Only a few authors, e.g. Cumings, continue to state that "Soviets did not have advance

knowledge of the attack"¹⁰.

From the Chinese point of view, their military intervention is generally treated sympathetically. In Allen Whiting's study, Anthony Farrar-

¹⁰B. CUMINGS, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, Princeton University Press 1990, pp.636-37.

⁵The limits of the revisionist arguments on this point come out clearly from the debate between Stueck and the Kolkos in *An Exchange of Opinion*, PACIFICAL HISTORICAL REVIEW, 2/1973.

⁶MERRILL, Korea. The Peninsular Origins of the War, Associated University Press 1989, Chapter 1.
⁷C. MacDONALD Korea: The War Before Vietnam, London, MacMillan 1986 and GYE-DONG KIM, Who Initiated the Korean War?, in J. COTTON e I. NEARY eds.) The Korean War in History, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989, pp. 33-50.

⁸Quoted in R. FOOT, *Making Known the Unknown War*, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, summer 1991, footnote n. 18.

⁹⁻J. MERRILL, 1989; ZHAI ZHIHAI and HAO YUFAN China's Decision to Enter the Korean War, CHINA QUARTERLY, March 1990, pp. 100-136; A. GROMYKO, Memories, London, Hutchinson 1989, pp. 131-2.

The Author(s).

Hockley's article, Peng Dehuai's and Nie Rongzhen's memories, the deployment of the "volunteers" was considered as defensive, or else strictly connected with domestic preoccupations. In these works it has been highlighted that Mao (and General Peng Dehuai) believed inevitable the intervention in Korea in order to limit the excessive American power in the area. Even if not all the Chinese leaders seemed to feel positively towards this intervention, Mao Zedong thought that some possible help from the Soviets would be more feasible in the North East Asian region than elsewhere (Taiwan or Indochina) for geo-political reasons¹¹. More documents from the former Soviet and Chinese archives will

probably greatly re-assess the historiography about the effective relations between China and Russia during the '50s, and enabling us to understand to what extent and for what purposes the two Communist countries were (or were not) interested in the outbreak and the continuation of the war.

From the Chinese point of view, we will be able to understand when the "Trilogy" conception - according to which the pro-Soviet third world idea was prominent - and when that of a "Dicotomy" - Korea as a dam to defend the frontiers with the corollary of a dialogue with the Americans - were finally accepted 12.

This reassessment will also clarify the question according to which a decision by US/UN troops not to cross the 38th parallel before the Chinese intervention would have terminated the war earlier¹³.

In general we must recognize that historians have - through secondary sources - dismantled the thesis of a war by proxy in Korea. Thus, the Korean war cannot be seen as a prelude for a change of policy in Europe. Furthermore, work in European archives has also proved that high officials and politicians of the Old Continent did not believe in a Soviet attack¹⁴.

¹¹A.S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War, Standford, Standford University Press 1960; A. FARRAR-HOCKLEY, A Reminiscence of the Chinese People's Volunteers in the Korean War, CHINA QUARTERLY, June 1984, pp. 287-04; PENG DEHUAI, Memoirs of a Chinese Marshal: the Authobiographical Notes of Peng Dehuai, Beijin, Foreign Languages Press 1984. Quoted in R. FOOT (DIPLOMATIC HISTORY): NIE RONGZHEN, Huiyi Lu, Beijin, PLA Publishers 1984.

¹²R. SIMMONS, The Strained Alliance, New York, Free Prees 1975; MAN HO HEO, La costance de l'unite nationale Coreenne: essai d'une nouvelle interpretation de la guerre de Coree, Doctoral thesis at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, supervisor: Prof. Alain Joxe 1988. ¹³W. STUECK, The Road to Confrontation, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press 1981, pp. 254-55; B. KAUFMAN, The Korean War, Philadelphia, Temple University Press 1986, pp. 83-85; R. FOOT, The Wrong War, Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1985, pp 67-74.

¹⁴G.A. CAMPANA, Il dilemma coreano: la Gran Bretagna fra Stati Uniti e Cina, Doctoral thesis in History of International Relations, Rome, supervisor: Prof Ennio Di Nolfo 1988. We refer also to statements made both by R. T. GRIFFITHS and W. ABELSHAUSER at a seminar at European University Institute (EUI), 6/2/90.

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2) Korea as a symbol for American foreign policy.

The US/UN intervention also poses problems of interpretation, although

these are now based on primary sources.

Some historians state that the commitment of the Truman administration to Korea in June 1950 stemmed entirely from its symbolic value. US credibility worldwide was at stake. Korea was of no strategic interest at all.

Burton I. Kaufman noted: "After the Communist victory in China, Korea become the only symbol left of America's willingness to contain Communist expansion in Asia. Washing its hands of Korea would be a signal to other Asians that the United States had abandoned them as well". This view is reported even in an even stronger way by Charles M. Dobbs: "Korea mattered little for its own sake; rather the perceived requirements of the Cold War made it important" 15.

These scholars mention as prominent the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in Washington: on some occasions the military chiefs asked for a removal of troops from the peninsula, and were not always

favourable to the course chosen by MacArthur¹⁶.

Although in certain periods (between 1945 and 1948) the JCS in Washington believed that Korea was not a practical base for US Armed forces, the theory of the entirely "symbolic value of Korea" stems from an over idealistic approach to American policy and to international relations in general. Korea was presented as a symbol to the European Allies, but to American policy-makers - the President, his National Security Council (NSC) advisers, the majority of the State Department officials, the Commander in Chief, Far Eastern Command (CINCFE) - it was not without real strategic significance. The withdrawal of US troops in 1948-49, in fact, was not due to the wish to abandon Korea to its fate, but to tactical considerations. The defense of Korea became more effective and less costly from US bases in Japan.

Ronald McGlothlen underlines an important factor against the "symbolic value" thesis. In his article, he reveals the steady attitude of Dean Acheson during the period 1947-1950 and the work of many of his faithful collaborators. Acheson was very much in favour of the economic recovery of South Korea, defended by a military apparate. Korea would have to contribute - like Germany to Europe - in the creation of a "workshop", the "workshop of Asia". Its economic reconstruction - which he wanted to be mentioned in the Truman Doctrine with \$250

¹⁵B.KAUFMAN 1986, pp. 23-24. C.M. DOBBS, *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War and Korea, 1945-1950*, Kent, Ohio, Kent State University Press 1981, pp. 160-192; see also STUECK 1981; R. BUHITE, *Soviet-American Relations in Asia 1945-54*, Norman University of Oklahoma Press 1981; J.I. MATRAY *The Reluctant Crusade*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press 1985.

¹⁶see, e.g. OHN CHANG IL, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and US Policy and Strategy Regarding Korea, Ph.D University of Kansas, 1983, University Microfilm International (UMI)

million aid - had to become the core of the economic reconstruction of a western oriented North East Asia in which Korea and Japan were to play the pivotal role. The so-called Acheson "perimeter speech" (the public statement in which Korea was left aside in US strategy) in January 1950 was, in fact, a concession to his bitter rival, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, who decided to flatter the domestic opposition¹⁷.

Domestic political pressures are often forgotten. Stephen Peltz reminds us of the attacks against the Truman's administration on Asian policy. In his words, "Truman and Acheson needed to interpret the North Korean attack as a part of a [Communist] global challenge". The Democratic administration, already strongly criticized for the "loss of China", also had to face heavy criticism from within the bureaucracy: Dean Rusk, John Foster Dulles, Douglas MacArthur, and the opposition in Congress. Later, after the dismissal of MacArthur, the General suceeded in shaping a common opinion according to which only the use of force could end the hostilities.

McCarthy also, putting himself at the head of the so-called "Asia firsters", disturbed Truman policy, contributing to the never-ending military *pour parlers*. Although some authors (Kaufman, Reichard, Caridi), and some McCarthy's biographers try to reconstruct the political American athmosphere of these years, a work based on a complete research of newspapers and magazines is still lacking. The role of some lobbies involved in Asian affairs, in particular the China Lobby, is today, also, quite obscure¹⁸.

From the international point of view, Marc Paul has persuasively demonstrated the importance of the "Atomic diplomacy", adopted for Korea by the Truman administration. He stresses the fact that Truman, relying on the nuclear umbrella, could afford a policy of non-decision for Korea after August 1945. Playing on the fact that they were the only nuclear power, the JCS could pledge for the withdrawal of troops.

¹⁷see R. McGLOTHEN, Acheson, Economics, and the American Committment in Korea, 1947-1950, PACIFIC HISTORICAL REVIEW, 1989, vol. LVII, pp. 23-54.

¹⁸S. PELTZ, US Decisions on Korean Policy, 1943-1950, in B. CUMINGS ed) Child of Conflict, Seattle University of Washington Press 1983, pp. 131-175; KAUFMAN 1985; G. REICHARD, Politics as Usual, Arlington, Heights, Ill, Harlan Davidson 1988; R.J. CARIDI, The Korean War and American Politics, Philadelphia, University of Pennsilvanya Press 1968. For the China Lobby: S.D. BACHRACK, The Committee of One Million, New York, Columbia University Press 1976; R. Y. KOEN, The China Lobby in American Politics, New York 1974. On the contrary, American public opinion during the war followed almost the same pattern that it followed in the Vietnam War; in the Korean case howevwer the loss of support was far more rapid. When the US intervened in June 1950, over 75% agreed that it was right to send troops. After the Chinese intervention, 65% of public opinion thought it had been a mistake. On the eve of the election of Eisenhower (October 1952) 67% were against the war, and by the time the truce was signed only 25% believed the war was worth fighting: H.G. SUMMERS Jr., Korean War Almanac, New York, Facts on File 1990, p. 216.

The Author(s).

Atomic control of the peninsula can certainly however not be seen as stemming from symbolic considerations¹⁹.

Other historians give evidence of the great geo-political importance attributed by the Truman administration to North East Asia since the end of the II World War. In the fall of 1945 the Americans pressed on the Soviets for an occupation zone in Southern Korea. Furthermore, Truman and the ICS asked for the control of some of the Kuriles islands, and a military mission to the Chinese mainland (Dalian, and some Northern ports). Mainland territories were considered important strategic outposts and Truman was compelled to give some of these up (Dalian and the Kuriles) and this was a qui pro quo to meet Stalin's demand for an area of occupation in Japan (Hokkaido).

Recalling the setting up of postwar Allied occupation in the Far East, Truman remarked: "If we had had transportation and troops available, we would have prevented them from doing what was done in Korea and Manchuria, but we had no transportation...We just didn't have the means". Some years later Eisenhower was heard to say, commenting on the US position in the Far East: "we had just given away the Kuriles, [I just don't understand] why in the name of God we did it. [it was the] damnest stupidity"20.

The underlined strategic interests of Washington and the above mentioned conflict of interests between US and USSR would have a major impact on the relationship between US and its allies, mainly Great Britain.

3) The prevalence of the civil origins of the war.

During the 1970s some revisionist historians anticipated, without however basing their anlaysis on solid sources, the thesis of the internal origin of the war.

This thesis became popular during the 1980s. It was later proposed in a ponderous work by Bruce Cumings, relying on "hard" sources -American, Chinese and Korean. Cuming's work - the most quoted history on the Korean War - influenced the researches of many historians. The main thesis he assumed, was that this war was, in fact, the outcome, and in a way - the continuation of a domestic revolutionary struggle whose origins derived from Korea's colonial history. International dynamics such as the Cold War with its strains between Moscow and Washington had little relevance in the outbreak of the war. To uphold this thesis he

²⁰M. GALLICCHIO, The Cold War Begins in Asia, New York, Columbia University Press 1988; M. GALLICCHIO, The Kuriles Controversy: US Diplomacy in the Soviet-Japan Border Dispute, 1941-

1956. PACIFIC HISTORICAL REVIEW, summer 1991.

 $^{^{19}}$ M. PAUL, Diplomacy Delayed, in B. CUMINGS, 1983. Truman's position was a bluff. In fact, the main constraints on the use of atomic weapons during the war were practical and political. Atomic weapons were not readily available. When the war began, the Air Force had no planes and no crews capable of mounting an atomic attack. Suitable atomic targets were also lacking. And the allied governments, particularly that of Great Britain, opposed this course.

The Author(s).

examines in his first monograph the Korean internal situation from 1945 to 1947 and its legacies with previous XXth century history, usually unexplored by other western historians.

In his second monography, in which he examines the period from 1947 up to early 1951, he assumes that North Koreans attacked with minimal foreign aid and they were mostly helped by insurrectionary procommunist movements in the South.

The interpretation of the revolutionary domestic origins of the war, however, brings Cumings to the conclusion that the Americans knew, in fact, of the scarce relevance of the Soviet threat. He sustains that Washington's goal was larger than mere intervention in Korea, that it did not in fact only aim to contain Soviet influence. The US intended to shape a new regional order for East Asia to protect American security and its economic interests. Thus, US's primary aim was to create a hegemonic power for containing revolutionary impulses in the peninsula.

Close to the lines of this approach, John Merrill gives an accurate report of the little-known guerrilla conflict in 1948-1950 in South Korea. His work demonstrates that the guerrilla movement was much larger and more long-lasting than has been previously thought.

Furthermore, Kaufman concurs with Cumings' view: "the conflict between North and South Korea was a true civil war and not merely a part of the global confrontation between Washington and Moscow". However, he later mitigates his judgement saying that this war was "a great power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union superimposed [italics added] on a civil war between North and South Korea".

Even William Stueck, though his study is not based on Korean sources, or a theoretical world-systems theory, but who places a much greater emphasis on the international dimension of the conflict, says: "contrary to prevailing opinion in the US in June 1950...the initiative for the attack came from Pyongyang, not Moscow or Peking"²¹

The theory of the domestic origin of the conflict is disputable, but is still alive in the same way as the debate on the primary influence of domestic and external events in the dynamics of international relations. When Cumings speaks of intentional politics performed by Washington, he comes very close to the obsolete theory of the great global conspiracy staged by the communists in the postwar period.

But in a more pragmatic way, his work can be effectively used to counteract the statement of a completely Soviet directed North-Korean attack. Failing to understand the indigenous currents at the roots of the

²¹B. CUMINGS, 1981 and 1990; J. MERRILL, 1989; B. KAUFMAN, 1986, p. 32; W. STUECK, *The Korean War as International History*, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, fall 1986, pp. 293-94. Stueck's positions in his next volume seem to have developed toward a traditional international view; quoted in R. FOOT, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY 1991, p. 414.

The Author(s).

North Korean invasion, the Truman administration, almost immediately assumed that it had been inspired directly by Moscow and Peking as part of a dangerous and aggressive new worldwide push for the extension of Communist influence.

As a conclusion to this paragraph, the thesis of an exclusively internal origin of the war is not entirely convincing when it brings to the extreme conclusion that korean society in the years preceding the war was in a kind of revolutionary situation, according to a Marxist analysis. Nationalism was in reality the main force, and even Korean communists were primarily nationalists.

The history of Korea is the history of a colonized country, which, from 1910 onward, struggled for de-colonization, not for revolution. Even today's North Korean communism has a strongly independent, national

component.

It seems more sound to follow the argumentation of Peter Lowe, an English scholar. Adopting the point of view of the Koreans themselves, he states that it was not a revolutionary situation, but "rather the continuation of a civil war that had started in 1945". Adopting a worldwide view he sustains that the hostilities can best be understood "in the light of developments…in China, Japan and in *Europe* [Italics added]"²².

4) Korea as a turning point for the global cold war process.

The Korean War was often seen as of decisive importance, provoking a clear-cut change in the attitude of the US administration. The historians emphazising the strong effect caused by this external event on the American policy-making process generally extend this interpretation to Europe and to the process of the defense of the Old Continent. Was the Korean war crucial to the establishment of US hegemony in East-West relations, to US military budgets, to its relations with its major allies?

Some scholars (Cohen, Tucker), come to Korea passing through China, and support revisionist arguments. They reverse the orthodox thesis according to which since the beginning of 1949, when China appeared to be lost (this was particularly evident from March-April 1949 with the fall of most of Manchuria and the big central-China towns, including Peking), Washington decided to adopt a policy of clear-cut hostility toward the Communist directed Government (non recognition). Cohen and Tucker, on the contrary, stress a wide spread attitude in the administration: the Secretary of State, Acheson, many officials in the State Department, but

²²P. LOWE, The Origins of the Korean War, London, Longman 1986, preface.

mainly the economic lobbies (traders and enterpreneurs) were decisively in favour of a normalization with Peking, and against the policy of nonrecognition. And, they state, this would have been a productive policy, because there were serious possibilities that China could chose a policy of differentiation with the Soviet Union, and that Mao Zedong become a sort of "Asian Tito". As stated previously, the lack of studies on the US domestic political athmosphere makes it difficult to accept wholeheartedly the - in other way fully documented - Cohen-Tucker thesis.

Truman's decision to intervene in the Korean conflict destroyed this possibility, and also that of a compromise course with China, while militarizing American foreign policy to a regrettable degree. Thus Cohen and Tucker see Korea as a turning point.

Similar arguments are supported by another historian: Ernest May. If May seems not to believe in the pro-China lobbies his opinion is a more psychological one. The Korean event really was a turning point: Truman's decision to intervene in Korea was the result of an emotional choice, emphasized by the need to give an answer to his critics for the loss of China. May stresses the thesis of a dualistic, ambiguous attitude toward Asia in US foreign policy (the balance between the condemnation of Colonialism, and the support of local colonialism) and says that an unexpected and external event (the outbreak of the war) made an impulsive reaction prevail in the US administration. In the decision between "calculated policy and axiomatic" both present in the US attitude toward East Asia before the outbreak of the war, the axiomatic, the more emotional, prevailed. Truman's decision to send troops to Korea was an instinctive reaction that expressed the national style, deeply rooted in American experience. For May, the Korean war had a strong "catalyzing effect" on the formation of the Cold War consensus. According to May (but also to Cohen, Tucker), the attitude of the US Administration for East Asia was unclear and ill-defined, whilst open towards Asian nationalism. Only this external act of aggression was able to push it toward the militarization of containment. These authors mention in particular - to underline the theory of a sharp turning point - the Acheson speech in January 1950 at the National Press club (supra) as a demonstration of compromise-oriented position of the US government taken aback by unforeseen events23.

But the reality is that this speech was public, and even if it is true that it had a great impact on the Koreans²⁴, these authors do not mention the

²³W. COHEN ed), New Frontiers in American East-Asian Relations, New York, Columbia University Press 1983; N.B. TUCKER, Pattern in the Dust, New York, Columbia University Press 1983; E. MAY and J.C. THOMSON Jr, American East Asian Relations, New York, Oxford University Press, 1972. ²⁴see R. FOOT, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, footnote n. 10 that gives details of various studies produced in South Korea in recent years. They document the preoccupation of South koreans about Acheson's

The Author(s).

domestic and secret process that had been going on in the American bureaucracy since june 1949, initiated by the Defense Department.

Gaddis also emphasizes the turning point character of the event. He takes May, Tucker, and Cohen's interpretations to the extreme, stressing the liberal attitude of Washington and pointing to the Korean War as the start of militarization in American policy. He relates to the accomodating attitude the US policy makers had prior to the Korean War. Truman, Marshall, and Acheson, had they been allowed to run their course, might have formed policies which would have resulted in the evolution of a multipolar world, operating on the balance of power game principles²⁵. Another supporter of the turning point thesis is James Matray. He says that if previously most scholars have agreed that the Truman Doctrine marked the crucial turning point in postwar American foreign policy, it can be said that the Korean War marked the emergence of US unlimited committment to defend the world from the threat of Soviet domination. Gaddis in 1974 said that at that time evidence existed to "suggest that historians in search of turning points in American diplomatic history might more profitably concentrate their attention on the events of 1950 than on the famous 15 weeks of 1947"26.

Looking at the present sources, has been documented enough material to define obsolete also the *turning point* thesis. According, for instance, to Cuming's recent work (1990), we can easily verify an American "awareness of crisis" similar to that faced in 1947. Three points were at the origin of it were: 1) the possible failure of the Marshall Plan for Western Europe, 2) the already certain victory of Mao Zedong in China during the second half of 1949, 3) the explosion of the first USSR A nuclear device in August 1949²⁷.

On the 25th of April 1950, Truman had already accepted the basic principles of a global document (NSC 68) which sanctioned the militarization of containment²⁸. Although the intention of this essay is not to examine this document, we can compare it to a regional one (NSC 48) prepared for East Asia in the same period.

January 1950 speech to place Korea outside the "defense perimeter". At the same time, North koreans had the impression that the Americans had placed South korea within the defense perimeter: see the traditional Northern interpretation in The US Imperialists Started the Korean War (Pyongyang, 1977) and B. CUMINGS's second volume.

²⁵J.L. GADDIS, La politica degli Stati Uniti verso la Corea, in Elena Aga Rossi a cura di) Gli Stati Uniti e l'origine della Guerra Fredda, Bologna, Il Mulino 1984.

²⁶J.I. MATRAY, 1985; I.L. GADDIS, Was The Truman Doctrine a real Turning Point?, FOREIGN AFFAIRS January 1974, 386-408. On this line also L.S. KAPLAN, The United States and NATO, the Formative Years, Lexington KJ, 1985 and R. JERVIS The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War, JOURNAL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION, December 1980, p. 563.

^{27:}B. CUMINGS, 1983, introduction.

²⁸:W. LOTH *Die Teilung der Welt, 1941-1955*, München, DTV, 1980, p. 246. On the genesis of the NSC 68, see P.Y. YAMMOND, *NSC68: Prologue to Rearmement*, in SCHILLING HAMMOND and SNYER, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*, New York 1962.

The Author(s)

As well as for the global concern, for Asia the decision to militarize the containment was taken well *before* the outbreak of the Korean War. The sending of military aid to the Asia was under way *before* the outbreack of the war.

In East Asia the change of directive driving away from the milder concept of the political containment, had started from the adoption of the reverse course in Japan, and the failure of bi-lateral negotiation for Korea in 1947, and continued throughout 1948 and 1949.

The "loss of China" accelerated a more rigid position by US administration, leading to the start of the militarization of the Asian regional leading document (NSC 48). The main crucial event quoted here was complementary to other nationalist, pro-communist subversions (Burma, Malaysia, Indochina) that contributed to a change from a more pro-nationalist attitude to an anti-communist one.

The chances for US recognition of Mao's regime were very poor even after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, and were virtually nil by the spring of 1950, prior to the outbreak of the war.

of the war.

Acheson himself (who has been very critical of the American policy in China) never accepted wholeheartedly the "Asian-Tito" theory, and was thus not in favour of a quick adjustement with Communist China. He always maintained however an ambivalent attitude towards a possible Sino-Soviet split.

The option for equivalence between Asian and Soviet Communism was vigorously stressed by several power centres within the Truman administration: they urged direct military support for East Asia and for keeping an independent state in Taiwan and the defense perimeter represented by Japan, Philippines, Indochina, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, etc..

From June 1949 onward the American administration, instigated by the Department of defense, started a policy of harsher treatment for Asia.

The Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, had asked for a NSC resolution, "increasingly concerned at the course of events in Asia".

Initially, the State Department, taking a milder position than the Pentagon, tried to control the making of the Asian NSC paper, and forwarded a study (PPS 51, march 1949) in which nationalist movements in East Asia were considered genuine, and the US support to French "imperialism" in Indochina regrettable.

The version of December 1949 (NSC 48), on the contrary, declared that it was essential for the US to react to the victory of communism in China seen as a "grievous political defeat", and warned of the effect of the "domino reaction" in South East Asia. Even harsher words were added by the JCS for the final version, approved by Truman, on December 30, 1949. "The situation in Asia has developed to the point where concrete action is required". The Pentagon asked for the beginning of military

The Author(s).

help to Asian countries (NSC 48/2)²⁹. Truman started the implementation of the Military Assistance Program (MAP) "for the general area of China" (\$75 millions). Military aid was sent in March to Thailand, in April to Burma, in May to the French for Indochina. By 13 January 1950 the Korean Aid Bill (\$60 millions for the second fiscal semester) had been passed.

After the outbreak of the Korean war and after the first months of military reversal, the already existing trends for the liberation of the northern part of the peninsula (MacArthur, the JCS, John K. Emmerson [North East Asia (NEA) Division, Department of state], Dulles [Ambassador at Large], Allison [director, NEA, Department of State]), coalesced in a new position which was very close to the future strategy of roll back. The administration passed in September 1950 a NSC document (NSC 81) that allowed US/UN troops to go north of the 38th parallel in a posture that should be "one of liberation rather than retaliation". The May 1951 NSC pronouncement (NSC 48/5) was in favour of a negotiated end of the war, but not of the reconstruction of the status quo ante, as previously stated. Korea had to be united and noncommunist³⁰.

A following NSC document (NSC 118/2, December 1951) incorporated a militarist study of the Pentagon in case of failure of the stalling negotiations. In spite of direct official reference to *Limited War*, this policy was never entirely adopted. In the US administration (as Rosemary Foot has fully demonstrated ³¹), the debate about widening the war continued to rage long after MacArthur was recalled.

In early summer 1951, for example, Dean Rusk, Acheson's assistant for Far eastern affairs, when recommending stronger measures against China and a bolder policy for Korea, said: "The Peiping regime may be a colonial Russian government - a Slavic Manchukuo on a large scale...It is not the government of China. It is not Chinese". However in agreement with this were also General Marshall Secretary of Defense, US permanent Ambassador to the UN Warren Austin, John Foster Dulles, Ambassador at large, charged for the negotiation for the Japanese Peace Treaty³².

This trend was even more accentuated in winter-spring 1953 with Dulles as Secretary of State (see, for example, NSC 139th meeting, April 8, 1953)³³.

²⁹A.J.ROTTER The Path to Vietnam, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987, pp 120-124.

³⁰:R.M. BLUM, *Drawing the Line*, New York, Northon 1983. R. FOOT, 1985, Ch.s 3-4-5, B. CUMINGS, 1983, introduction.

³¹R. FOOT, 1985; G.A. CAMPANA, L'armistizio di Corea, STORIA DELLE RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI, 1986/1, p. 110.

³²R. FOOT, 1985, p 140.

³³*Ibid.*, 1985, p 210

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It seems more sound, in conclusion, to take a different view of the meaning of the Korean conflict, arguing that it *accelerated* the militarization of containment, and - in doing so - the Cold War, but that it was not pivotal³⁴. The korean hostilities simply highlighted a trend already well under way in US policy circles, that would have been developed even if the Korean war had not been started.

The historiographical problem of ending hostilities. The Unpopularity of the war, and the pressures from Asian and European Allies

This is the most intriguing part of the recent historiography, to which few researchers have added and which has been strangely neglected. My own work has broadened certain aspects of British participation to the war and of the interactions with European politics.

Important works detail the Australian and Canadian perspectives. However close their relationship with the United States was, different perceptions still existed. Australia, for example, had important priorities to safeguard, and - following the British leadership -, tried to defend itself from the possible threats from Middle East and Malaya. She was also concerned with the making of a security treaty with the United States, and with the conclusion of a safe Japanese peace treaty. We must also recall that other allied powers plaied also a very important role in bringing the conflict to an end. India, for example, - on the eve of the non-aligned movement - played a decisive role in keeping the contacts between Peking and the western capitals alive³⁵.

We will not quote here the French position - which sent military and naval forces to Korea. Her diplomatic attitude towards US policy was never critical since Paris at the time was highly dependent on US aid for Indochina where she was engaged in a desperate struggle with Vietminh insurgents led by Ho Chi Minh, and to some degree this military support was a quid pro quo.

The South korean dictator, Syngman Rhee accepted the armistice only when he was certain of a security treaty with the US and \$3 billion in his bag. The direct Japanese involvement in the war - by then denied, today proved - made the last part of the conflict less *moral* and caused the

³⁴W. LAFEBER, NATO and the Korean War: a Context, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, Fall 1989, p. 461-73; M.P. LEFFLER The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW, April 1984. Similar positions held by G.H. CHANG, Friends and Enemy: China United States and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972, Standford, Standford University Press 1990; A.J. Rotter, 1987.

³⁵G.A. CAMPANA 1988; R. O'NEILL Australia in the Korean War, Canberra, Australian War Memorial and Australian Gvt Publishing Service 1981; D. STAIRS The Diplomacy of Constraint, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1974; S. DAYAL, India's Role in the Korean War, Delhi, S. Chand and Co. 1959.

Americans to devote much attention not only to the demands of the adversary, but also to the proposals of their friends, that is taking in account the moderate position of the most politically influential ally: Great Britain.³⁶

The reflections of the last part of this essay will move out from the British opposition to the 1951-53 prolongation of the war. But before coming to the core of our thesis we will identify the causes of US-British friction since the intervention.

1) Approval of US intervention, modification of US declaration, Bevin's

attitude, delay in sending troops.

Approval by the Cabinet of US intervention was given, but only after severe criticism by the *Foreign Office*. Kenneth Younger - then Foreign Secretary *ad interim* on account of the illness of Ernest Bevin - noted that the US intervention was dangerous and aimed at hampering the Communist Chinese from landing on Formosa. This was a sensitive topic: if the war was extended, India and Pakistan would intervene to defend the newly born PRC. And this would cause a crisis of conscience for London. The danger represented to continuing cohesion with the other Commonwealth nations was underlined by another experienced diplomat, Bill Dening.

From his bed at the hospital, even Bevin noted the danger of involving Formosa. Each of these comments were based on the defence of British trade in China and in particular the pivotal role of Hong Kong. Later, Bevin would deny his initial support of the decision to go to Korea: thishe said - was a blunder made only by Attlee. However the *Prime Minister*, Attlee, obtained the approval of the *Cabinet*, thus giving full support to US intervention. The opposition in the *Cabinet* succeeded in making Washington erase from the public statement that the attack was conducted by "the centrally directed communist imperialism", which was regarded as "ham fisted" 37.

Regarding military help, the British *Chiefs of Staff* (COS) were initially against sending land troops, fearing for other British outposts like Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Middle East (Iran)³⁸. But the American pressures and more economic aid for the defense programs in Europe helped to make a decision that was basically political.

2)Proposed buffer zone in Korea.

The danger of a widening of the hostilities to China (PRC), and the possibly unfortunate consequences for Great Britain became even more real when, in October, US forces trespassed the 38th parallel. At the same time, Tibet, whose international *status* had been regulated in 1914 with the mediation and the co-responsibility of Britain, was occupied by the

³⁶R. FOOT, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, pp. 422, 423.

³⁷G.A. CAMPANA, 1988, pp 70-73

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 73-75

The Author(s).

forces of a "strongly materialistic" - as Lhasa commented - Communist state: China.

The British COS proposed to send north to the 38th parallel only south koreans in order to avoid eventual complications in the East-Asian area.

The US response was negative.

In November, when the chinese intervention in Korea was made reality, the British military summit proposed a (*de facto*) de-militarized North Korea. Though not being a definitive solution for the war, the Chinese would have accepted this proposal as a base for negotiation. This project was boycotted by the US Pentagon without being seriously considered by the State Department³⁹.

3) Summit in December 1950

The failure of the US/UN offensive (the *home for Christmas attack*) after the Chinese intervention caused some incontrolled reactions in the US political world, and Truman hinted at the possible use of the atomic

device against China.

MacArthur was proposing the withdrawal of all the forces from Korea to Japan and the bombing of Manchuria from there. The British Chiefs of Staff were terrified by the resemblance of this option to an "asian Dunquerque", and the European allies sponsored a *summit* requested by the British Cabinet with the Americans in December. In particular, the French were disturbed by the possible result of a wide spread war in the Far East, which would result in the necessity for an immediate rebuilding of a West-German army. For the British the war with China meant a worse defense position in the Middle East and in Europe.

For London the goal of the Washington meeting was political: "localize

and solve" the conflict.

If there was no result in moderating the Americans on the use of the Atomic device - Washington refused to agree on any kind of inter-allied pact -, the British did apparently succeed in restraining Washinghton from an all-out war with Peking. The Americans were impressed by the British argument that a intervention in China would surely provoke the implementation of the March 1950 USSR/RPC pact and thus result in a general war. The US/UN troops would simply have to "say good bye" in such a case.

The British proposed the restitution of Taiwan and a seat at the UN to the PRC as a *quid pro quo* to start negotiations. Although this was not accepted, the word "negotiation" came finally into the US lexicon.

Last but not least, the *summit* served as a reinforcement of the formal engagement taken in the month of December by the new *Strategic Headquarters Allied Powers*, *Europe* (SHAPE) director Eisenhower: the US would defend Europe "from the first day" in case of Communist attack, and *before* the creation of a West German Army. This was oxygen

³⁹Ibid., pp. 181-172

The Author(s).

for the British economic contingence: after a short period of amelioration from the outbreak of the war, the extra-defense expenditure was seriously damaging the balance of payments, without the renewal of any kind of formal aid engagement by the Americans⁴⁰.

4) Pressure by British public opinion, by the Commonwealth conference, by the left in the Cabinet.

Intellectuals, Pro-Chinese lobbies - that in Great Britain, unlike the US pro-nationalist China Lobby, were against the war - and India asked

Washington for moderation in the Commonwealth Conference.

In January the *Cabinet* revealed its strong resistance to the condemnation of China as an aggressor, although this was requested and obtained by the US in the UN. Some leftist ministers such as Gaitskell, Bevan, Strachey and high officials (Younger, Strang) expressed for different reasons their opposition to further measures against China, and succeeded in modifying the policy of the *Cabinet* ⁴¹.

5) Non-repatriation policy and the Foreign Office.

Despite much discussion, it is still not clear if the British stance had some influence on the dismissal of MacArthur. It is however certain that the opening of the negotiations in Korea (July 1951) made the British ruling class hope for a quick end to hostilities. When it became clear that this would not occur, the *Foreign Office* was shocked. The new Conservative *Minister for Foreign Affairs*, Anthony Eden, had to face a technical problem that could easily lead to the failure of the negotiations: the non-repatriation issue of the prisoners of war (POW). To guarantee the right of free choice the Americans decided to ask for an amendment of the International law (Geneva 1949).

Many of the prisoners in US/UN hands did not want to be repatriated to a Communist country (North Korea or People's Republic of China). This humanitarian principle was also accepted by the British. However Eden's position was tentative, together with that of the majority of the *Foreign Office*. Only the strong anti-communist stance of the Prime Minister, Churchill, accepted *in toto* the American position in April 1952⁴².

6) Anglo-Indian initiative and the "de facto" move of the negotiations to the VII UN General Assembly.

The position of the British diplomacy did not change very much under conservative rule. The war in Korea had to be stopped at the earliest opportunity, and the best opportunity was represented by the diplomatic relationship that London had with India, a former *Dominion*. Even if often defined "shifty and tricky", diplomats like Panikkar (later

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 191-203

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 220-233.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 306-310.

Raghavan) in Peking and Menon in London had a pivotal role in keeping alive the contacts between London and the Communist China.

In the middle of May, 1952, The Foreign Office found out that the Chinese were in favour of a solution for the prisoner issue which would consent "saving their face". No actual coincidence can be proved but the bombing of the Suhio dams on the 23th of July - decided by the Pentagon - caused the Chinese position to rigidify and this diplomatic démarche therefore failed. One author (Foot) has compared this event to the failure of the negotiating operation "Marigold" in Vietnam (1965), scuppered as US jet bombers attacked the Hanoi area⁴³.

The real success of the British diplomacy however was reached in November, when the Korean issue - which became more political than technical - were brought to the VII UN General Assembly. The divergence with the Americans relating to the ending of the war reached its *nadir*⁴⁴.

7)The problem of nuclear blackmail and Churchill's position after Rhee's ultimate reluctance.

This is the most intriguing problem of recent historiography, a problem to which British scholars have added fresher interpretations. For a long time American historians (La Feber, Hoopes, Adams, Eisenhower himself in his memoirs) have maintained that the war was ended by Eisenhower's strategy to threaten the use of atomic weapons, thus forcing the Chinese to accept a compromise on the POW question. Dulles added points to that thesis, reporting that he had conveyed the possible use of the atomic device to Peking through Nehru in May 1953. Some historians have recently confirmed this view (Gaddis, Ambrose), saying that Eisenhower's stance was a calculated one, and that he would never have used such a weapon for Korea. They base their statement on the 20 May NSC meeting in which Eisenhower accepted the possible use of such a weapon, if the negotiations were to break down.

The eventuality that the Americans would have used the atom bomb is highly questionable as the before-mentioned NSC meeting took only place after the Chinese had shown clearly that they would take part in a negotiated solution. This solution - and Eisenhower knew it - was moving along precisely those lines established in the Indian compromise. Stalin's death had changed the Chinese's mind dramatically, and they were eager to stop a dangerous and costly war. The new situation was due to a changed relation between the Chinese and the Soviets, as well as to the revival of the Anglo-Indian mediation on the POW problem⁴⁵.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 310-325, R.. FOOT, 1990 p.214.

⁴⁴G.A. CAMPANA, pp. 331-348.

⁴⁵W. LAFEBER, America, Russia and the Cold War, New York 1967; T. HOOPES, The Devil and John Foster Dulles, Boston, Little Brown 1973; S. ADAMS, Firsthand Report, London Hutchinson 1962; D. EISENHOWER, The White House, Years Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1963. More cautious, J.L. GADDIS The Unespected John Foster Dulles: Nuclear Weapons, Communism and the Russians, in

John Kotch also argues convincingly, demonstrating how the major problem for the Eisenhower administration in the last few months of the war was not the question of performing of a nuclear policy, but that of how to force the South Korean dictator (Syngman Rhee) to accept the idea of an armistice. A *coup d'etat* was prepared against him, though not enacted. Churchill, even the most pro-american in the British *Cabinet*, cabled directly to Eisenhower, proposing to dismiss Syngman Rhee or even arrest him⁴⁶.

An evaluation of the British Role in East Asia. The legacies of the Korean War and the ethic of the "three interlocking circles".

The British already had a controversial record with the Americans in East Asia, the geographical area in which the *Special Relationship* worked less effectively. The major problem was the integration of China in postwar East Asian economic order and its relations with Japan. London, giving its diplomatic recognition to Peking in January 1950, did not communicate to the Americans all its opposition to the US policy of non-recognition. The attitude of British towards China can be summarized with Churchill's word:

"I do not regard Communist China as a formidable adversary...for the next four of five years 400 million Chinese will be living just where they are now. They cannot swim, they are not much good at flying and the Trans-Siberian railway is already overloaded" 47

London had already demonstrated her opposition to a *Pax Americana* in 1945 when it did not accept participation in an American proposed consultory commission (*Far Eastern Advisory Commission* - FEAC -) similar to the one proposed for Europe in 1943 (*European Advisory Commission* - EAC -). Later it became possible to reach a compromise (Moscow, December 1945), but the result of this compromise (*Far Eastern Commission* - FEC - and Allied Council for Japan - ACJ - did not in fact work.

R.A. IMMERMAN ed) John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1990; see also S. AMBROSE, Eisenhower: the President, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1984. For a documentary reference: Memo of Discussion, 145th meeting of the NSC, 20/5/53, in FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES (FRUS), XV, vol. 1, pp. 1064-1068. For a fresher view, see: R. FOOT, DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, pp. 425-426, M.A.RYAN, New York, M.E. SHARPE, Inc. 1989 chapter VII.

⁴⁶J. KOTCH, The Origins of the American Committment to Korea, in B. CUMINGS, 1983; G.A. CAMPANA, 1988, p. 387.

⁴⁷Prime Minister Minute, 26/8/52, Public Record Office (PRO) Foreign Office (FO)371/99584.

The control of occupied Japan and South Korea was entirely in the hands of the SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers: i.e. General Douglas MacArthur).

Britain decided not to show its dissent to US policy in North East Asia, especially after 1947, in order to obtain US economic help for Europe and South East Asia, given that this aid would be closely connected with

the management of her own economic crisis⁴⁸.

American assistance was made concrete through purchases of Malayan rubber and tin necessary for the recovery of the British dollar gap. US aid started by the fall of 1949. The main reason for US support to British and French colonialist positions in South East Asia was the wish to alleviate the reservations of these countries towards fostering the integration of Germany into the western defense system.

The British decided, in order to preserve the US assistence policy in South East Asia, not to communicate to them their complete dissent about US policy in Korea and Japan. The British conclusions about the relations

with US, censored and not sent to US were:

"In the Far East our main problem lies not with the inhabitants or Governments of the area, but with the United States whose policies we must endeavour to influence along lines acceptable to ourselves" 49.

This line of conduct was successful regarding Malaysia, and this diminished the dollar gap, but the British had little influence on the situation in Japan and in China.

London's conduct during the Korean war compelled Washington to accept the *status quo* in North East Asia - and in doing this it was very successful - but the effects of the Korean war were on the whole negative. From a strategic point of view, the British had to cede to Americans all its influence on Japanese policies, and more generally those of the North East Asian scenario.

In economic matters the British continued to worry about Japanese economic competition in South East Asia, and were forced to compete with their allies for increasingly expensive Far Eastern raw materials. Finally, due to US demand and without sufficient US economic help for the rearmament program⁵⁰, they diverted resources - through NATO - from the pressing business of economic recovery for the acceleration and expansion of the Western European re-armament programs.

⁴⁸A. ROTTER, 1987 and, for example, see CAB, CP(49) 175, 23/8/49.

⁴⁹Permanent Under Secretary Commission (PUSC)53, 30/8/49 Regional Co-operation in South-East Asia and the Far East, PRO FO371/76385.

⁵⁰G. C. PEDEN, The Economic Implications of the UK's Roles in World Affairs in the 1950', Paper given at the EUI, 25/10/91. p. 15.

After the Korean War, the framework in which British Governments were moving faltered. Not one of the celebrated *Three Interlocking Circles* intersecting in London, and symbolizing the pride of the Imperial Great Britain, were completely healthy. The *British/Commonwealth* one was deeply influenced by the economic crisis, while the sterling area was reduced. The American *Special Relationship* did not always work as is demonstrated in this essay. In *Europe* - the third circle - Britain had to accept - during the war in the Far East, and probably mostly because of this - West Germany within the western fold, despite the serious fears that remained about German economic, and indeed military, competitiveness⁵¹.

 $^{^{51}}$ M. PETER, Britain, the Cold War and the Economics of German Rearmament, 1949-51., in A. DEIGHTON ed) 1990.



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