

2014

# Cold War Contingencies: Rethinking the Inevitability of Post-World War II Superpower Conflict

Laurence Toal  
ltoal@wellesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection>

---

## Recommended Citation

Toal, Laurence, "Cold War Contingencies: Rethinking the Inevitability of Post-World War II Superpower Conflict" (2014). *Honors Thesis Collection*. 188.

<http://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection/188>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. For more information, please contact [ir@wellesley.edu](mailto:ir@wellesley.edu).

**Cold War Contingencies: Rethinking the Inevitability of Post-World War II**

**Superpower Conflict**

Laurence Marie Toal

Advisor: Craig Murphy

25 April 2014

Wellesley College

Department of Political Science

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	3
I. Introduction.....	3
II. Overview of Previous Cold War Origins Scholarship.....	7
III. Purposes of This Interpretation of Cold War Origins.....	11
IV. Methodology: Counterfactual Reasoning.....	12
V. Unified Germany as a Plausible World Counterfactual.....	21
VI. Unified Korea as a Plausible World Counterfactual.....	24
VII. Levels of Contingency: Turning Points.....	25
VIII. Roadmap.....	36
 CHAPTER 2: GERMANY.....	 39
I. Introduction.....	39
II. Turning Point 1: The Potsdam Conference.....	46
III. Turning Point 2: The Bizone.....	51
IV. Turning Point 3: The London Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting.....	61
V. Turning Point 4: The Berlin Crisis.....	66
VI. Conclusion.....	76
 CHAPTER 3: KOREA.....	 78
I. Introduction.....	78
II. Turning Point 1: The Korean People’s Republic.....	84
III. Turning Point 2: The Moscow Agreement and the Joint Commission.....	93
IV. Turning Point 3: Korea at the United Nations.....	101
V. Turning Point 4: The Korean War.....	108
VI. Conclusion.....	116
 CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION.....	 119
I. Introduction.....	119
II. Some Comments on Methodology.....	120
III. Implications for Cold War Studies.....	123
 Bibliography.....	 128
 Acknowledgements.....	 132

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### I. INTRODUCTION

Now that the Cold War has been decisively ended, it has largely entered collective historical memory and myth as an inevitable conflict (whether because of ideology or because of the meeting of two great powers), over-determined and made necessary by Soviet Communism's thesis of class struggle and the United States's equally ideological – though supposedly less militant – capitalism at the expense of democracy. But diametrically opposed ideologies by themselves are hardly a sufficient condition for the creation of a half-century long Cold War culture. It is not even a necessary condition, as years of great power war between states with identical political systems and alliances between states with diametrically opposed systems demonstrate. But if the chasm between communism and capitalism, and the different types of government they produced, is only one factor leading to the Cold War, what, then, can we say *caused* the Cold War? Contributing factors, after all, are much easier to identify and much more numerous than causal factors. This debate is far from being resolved, but this paper presents a new and previously underutilized way of examining the causes of the Cold War: arguing, via counterfactuals, that the Cold War was caused by the divisions of both Germany and Korea into two states.

For the purposes of this paper I am choosing to focus on a middle ground, giving primacy not to systemic factors such as realism's supposed anarchy in the international system nor to individuals but rather to specific events and the circumstances surrounding them. To be sure, systemic factors and individual actors will not be ignored in this argument, as the events in question could not have happened without them. Rather, they will be transferred to the

background, analyzed not as causes but as contributing factors, the sort of factors that counterfactual arguments recognize as necessary but not sufficient to bring about the changes we want to see in the present. Although the Cold War depended on the divisions of Germany and Korea, and the divisions depended on multiple contributing factors, the divisions were not the only possible outcomes of said contributing factors. This paper will show that there were multiple opportunities for the United States and the Soviet Union to reach agreements on Germany and Korea that resulted in those countries being unified. It will also show that breaking the causal chain between the contributing factors and the German and Korean divisions strengthens the causal chain between those divisions and the start of the Cold War, as the contributing factors themselves were not enough to cause the Cold War.

### **A. Definitions**

Defining the Cold War, much less pinpointing its beginning, is a problem that continues to perplex historians and political scientists even as they argue over its causes. Therefore, before proceeding any further, it is necessary to make clear exactly what definitions and concepts I will be referring to when using phrases such as “the Cold War” and “prevention of the Cold War”.

Much of the difficulty in discussing the beginnings and causes of the Cold War arise from the fact that “Cold War,” as the term is commonly used, does not actually refer to any one specific event, date, or range of dates. Rather, it is a somewhat loose, catch-all term used to describe a culture within and a state of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union from after World War II until the definitive dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The term itself was first used in reference to relations between the USSR and a Western country in 1946 when George Orwell wrote that Russia had been waging a cold war against the Britain since the

Moscow conference in December of 1945; it was not until April 1947 when American presidential adviser Bernard Baruch used the term in a speech at the South Carolina House of Representatives that the term was popularized by American media to describe the ideological conflict between the Soviets and the West and became a mainstay of foreign policy discourse for the next forty years.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, many secondary sources and some collections of primary sources refer to the entire period from August 1945 to the end of the USSR as the Cold War.

Presenting the Cold War as mere ideological conflict, however, skips over many of the nuances of the superpower relationships during that time period, and fails to sufficiently distinguish it from other times when great powers with differing ideologies or methods of government shared the international arena. Indeed, it fails even to sufficiently distinguish the post-World War II period from the state of relations between the U.S. and Russia/the Soviet Union from the beginnings of the Bolshevik Revolution. I argue that distinguishing the Cold War relies on examining the development and solidification of nation-wide cultures of fear and anti-communist or anti-capitalist sentiment in the U.S. and the Soviet Union – cultures that were inextricably linked to the physical lines dividing Korea and Germany. Preventing the Cold War, then, means preventing or sufficiently moderating the development of this sort of Cold War consensus in both the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

The militarization of the Cold War, however, is much easier to define and identify. As a cold war is, by definition, one that does not include direct military conflict between the two belligerents, we must look at military action between the belligerents' allies, that is, tangential conflicts and proxy wars. Tangential conflicts, such as the British-French anti-communist fight in Indochina in 1945 may or may not involve the major belligerents (or superpowers) of the cold

---

1 Bernard Baruch, *Baruch: The Public Years* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1960): 388.

war; proxy wars do, and therefore will be the only ones considered in the discussion of the militarization of the Cold War.

Proxy wars come in two sorts: wars “between regional states behind each of which – or behind only one – stands a superpower who supplies the state by indirect military intervention” and those “between regional states in which external powers may intervene directly when a local state is defeated”.<sup>2</sup> Just as “there is a spectrum of aid to Third World states from financial assistance, through arms supplies and the attachment of advisers to the employment of pseudo-volunteers in combat and finally to the formal commitment of ground troops” there is a spectrum of superpower involvement in and superpower attachment of importance to proxy wars.<sup>3</sup> The proxy wars between the U.S. and the Soviet Union fall into the first category, starting with the Greek Civil War from 1946 to 1949 between the American-supported Greek Kingdom and leftist rebels and continuing through the years to the Nicaraguan Civil War in the 1980s. When referring to the militarization of the Cold War as something that could have been prevented by different outcomes in Korea and Germany, it is these sorts of proxy wars that are being referenced: with different outcomes in Korea and Germany, the U.S. and the Soviet Union may have still given aid to the fighters in the conflicts, but without the Cold War consensus behind them, they would not have escalated to the status of proxy wars for the two superpowers.

In pinpointing the divisions of Germany and Korea and identifying particular dates, I am identifying two separate dates as potential starting points: the legal division of Korea with the dual declarations of statehood from the Republic of Korea on 15 August 1948 and the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea on 9 September 1948; and the legal division of Germany

---

2 Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “The Strategy of War by Proxy,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 19. 263.

3 Philip Towe, “The Strategy of War by Proxy,” *The RUSI Journal* 126. 23.

with the dual declarations of statehood from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany) on 23 May 1949 and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) on 7 October 1949.

There is a distinction that must be drawn between causes and contextual contributing factors. In this paper, I will be arguing for the divisions of Germany and Korea as the direct causes of the Cold War, that is, without either of these divisions the Cold War would not have happened. Several other factors such as ideology (either communist or capitalist) and the motivations of individual actors such as American president Harry Truman and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, promoted as causes in much other scholarship, will here be discussed as background factors that worked to amplify the effects of the divisions but would not, on their own, be sufficient to create and maintain the Cold War.

## II. OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS COLD WAR ORIGINS SCHOLARSHIP

Previous scholarship on the Cold War and its origins has tended to fall into one of three very broad categories, which Richard Crockatt neatly summed up in 1995: writings are “either ‘orthodox’ (Soviet expansionism was to blame), ‘revisionist’ (American expansionism was to blame), or ‘post-revisionist’ (history is complicated)”.<sup>4</sup> Although there was an initial push to assign each school of thought to a specific time period – the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, respectively, such assignments are unhelpful at best and incorrect at worst. The categories themselves remain useful, however, with the caveat that the lines between them are not as distinct as previously thought. This section will briefly summarize each of the categories and

---

4 Richard Crockatt, “The Origins of the Cold War and the Problems of Synthesis: A Review of Recent Work,” *Contemporary European History* 4, 383-392.

explain where my theory falls.

In a survey of literature on the origins of the Cold War published in 1969, Norman A. Graebner identifies no fewer than six different explanations that scholars had come up with to explain the start of the Cold War, making it quite clear that not even those who were present to witness the beginnings of the conflict could agree on why or even when it began. The multiple schools of thought that Graebner identifies in pre-1969 literature fall into three main categories. First, there are structural arguments. These are ones drawing on Alexis de Tocqueville to “accept the Cold War as an historic confrontation which always pits any two nations, recently elevated to prominence, in a struggle for power” or viewing the Cold War as an imperialist battle with roots in “the British-Russian conflict across Central Asia in the nineteenth century [or] in the Russo-American rivalry over Manchuria at the turn of the century”.<sup>5</sup> Both of these theories accept the inevitability of the Cold War. Second, there are the ideological arguments, which push the starting date of the Cold War back to the October 1917 Russian Revolution. This is true of both arguments which place blame on Soviet communist ideology and those which place blame on American anti-communist ideology: the first argue that communism may have been destroyed – and the Cold War thus avoided – “by a more concerted military effort against the Red Army in 1918 and 1919”; the second argue that “the Cold War indeed began in 1918, not in any Bolshevik declaration of ideological warfare against the West, but in the Western invasion of Russia and the international ostracism of the Bolshevik regime which followed”.<sup>6</sup> By view of these proponents of ideological causes, communism and capitalism were bound to clash from communism’s inception, and any counterfactuals attempting to undo the Cold War would need to undo the

---

5 Norman A. Graebner, “Cold War Origins and the Continuing Debate,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13 (1969): 123-4.

6 *Ibid.*, 124.

Bolshevik revolution.

Finally, and most closely related to the argument I put forth, are those who find the Cold War's origins in the events of World War II. They, while agreeing that the Cold War was not in general inevitable, are not agreed as to what the direct or proximate causes of the Cold War *were*. Scholars of the fifties and sixties – and of today – are split as to whether the division of Europe was necessary in order to ensure victory in Europe. Here is the first example of contingency offered by this theory: what if the Western powers could have defeated Germany in Europe without involving the Slavic countries? Or, had that not been an option and the occupation of Europe proceeded as it did in reality, could the United States have taken a more diplomatic, conciliatory view of the Soviet goals in Europe that would have allowed for a different postwar map of Europe and no Cold War? These questions were not completely answered, but it is these early questions that form the historical basis for the questions I will be asking about the divisions of Germany and Korea.

By 1972, when David S. Patterson published his review of literature on Cold War origins, the multiple theories that Graebner had identified had been distilled into two broad categories. Conventional interpretations that “argued that the far reaching expansionist aims and revolutionary subversion of the totalitarian Soviet regime resulted in the American commitment of its economic, political, and military power to contain this threat and defend freedom and democracy in Europe”.<sup>7</sup> However, Patterson adds an additional descriptor to this category: works could be considered conventional even if they did not blame the Soviet Union for the Cold War as long as they “emphasized the inevitability of an intense power struggle between two

---

<sup>7</sup> David S. Patterson, “Recent Literature on Cold War Origins: An Essay Review,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 55 (1972): 320.

incompatible ideologies” or of “America’s reluctant response to the Russian expansion”.<sup>8</sup> Such conventional analyses of the Cold War leave no room for contingencies in its origins and do not differentiate the Cold War from any previous instances of conflict between superpowers. The second category, revisionist interpretations, Patterson divides into two subsections: one that argues that “American leaders’ overemphasis on the cleavage between the political ideologies of the Soviet Union and the United States resulted in rigidly anti-Russian policies which escalated Russian-American tensions beyond reasonable bounds”.<sup>9</sup> This argument, which places the blame for the Cold War on individuals acting within a structure and therefore affecting the structure, has a built in counterfactual: with different leaders there may not have been a Cold War as American-Soviet relations would have continued on being strained but not unreasonably so. This marks one of the first appearances of the acceptance of the avoidability of the Cold War. The second sort of revisionism Patterson identifies argues that “the structural requirements of a mature capitalistic society, more than defects of personality, generated an expansionist foreign policy”.<sup>10</sup> This argument returns to a structuralist theory of the origins of the Cold War and has more elements of inevitability than does its sister revisionist theory, as it does not allow for any sort of temporally-close counterfactual that could prevent the Cold War. None of the books Patterson surveys give a precise starting date for the Cold War, but they collectively cover American foreign policy over the period 1941-1954, and those that belong to the second revisionist school and name America’s capitalist system as a cause of the Cold War go back, at least implicitly, to the birth of the United States as an independent nation.

This paper singles out the division of Korea as the beginning of the Cold War, and the

---

8 Patterson, “Recent Literature,” 320-21.

9 Ibid., 321.

10 Ibid.

division of Germany as the last moment at which the Cold War culture could have been prevented from taking hold in the United States and the Soviet Union. In identifying specific events rather than abstract concepts or any specific leaders, I merge both the structural and personal arguments set forth by revisionists above, while framing the questions in such a way as to allow temporally-relevant counterfactual arguments to be constructed. And as I will argue that the United States and the Soviet Union shared responsibility for missing opportunities to resolve the so-called “German Question” and the Korean situation (either before or after the beginning of the Korean War), this can broadly be considered a post-revisionist paper.

### **III. PURPOSES OF THIS INTERPRETATION OF COLD WAR ORIGINS**

With so much pre-existing scholarship on the origins of the Cold War, what is the impetus behind this project, and how is it to be distinguished from the rest of the literature? The goals of this paper are twofold: to improve understanding of the contingencies leading up to the Cold War and improve understanding of superpower relations. As noted above, few of the theories acknowledge that the Cold War was a contingent event, and even fewer of those that do offer alternative explanations. Cold War origins scholarship that identifies the Cold War as an inevitable event cite several paradigms of superpower relationships to support their claims, as Graebner illustrated. The notion of the Cold War as an inevitable conflict is, in its turn, used to provide evidence of the validity of other paradigms. However, if the contingencies leading up to the Cold War can be sufficiently demonstrated, this calls into question theories of international relations that predict necessary superpower conflict, such as de Tocqueville’s assertion that the United States and Russia could not rise to superpower status and establish hegemony over their

respective areas of the world without becoming enemies. This has consequences for, for one example, the ongoing debate between classical realists and neorealists as to whether bipolar or multipolar international systems are more stable and peaceful. Such implications will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY: COUNTERFACTUAL REASONING**

The word “counterfactual,” at the most basic level, simply means “contrary to facts”: it describes a situation which did not happen in reality. They are the “what if” questions and “what might have been” speculations that are very common in day-to-day life, but are not seen as often in historical and political science literature. When we build counterfactual scenarios, we make changes to the past and trace the alternate series of events to see what differences would be made to the present.

Counterfactuals and the rigorous construction of narratives of history that might have been have wide-ranging and important uses. Counterfactuals, as Richard Ned Lebow points out, are used to “probe nonlinear causation and the understanding policymakers, historians, and international relations scholars have of historical causation” and to “demonstrate the contingency of cases [...] that are critical for the construction of theories (i.e., balance of power, power transition) or offered as evidence in support of them”.<sup>11</sup> What he does not say, but that is equally true, is that counterfactuals are just as useful for *criticizing* these theories: many of them, especially those used to explain the behavior of superpowers during the Cold War, claim that whatever happened – be it the start of the war in the first place, any of the Berlin Crises, the

---

<sup>11</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 3.

Sino-Soviet split, and so on – were inevitable. Showing the breakdown of inevitability into links of contingent events allows us to find weak places in our theories and refine them to make better predictions, rather than simply provide convenient explanations.

There are, broadly speaking, two main types of counterfactuals. There are what Lebow deems “long-shot” counterfactuals, which are “minimal rewrites of history at a considerable temporal remove from the event [one wishes] to mutate. They entail a long chain of events between antecedent and consequent, and many enabling counterfactuals”.<sup>12</sup> These are the more complicated and often the less plausible of the two types, but are nevertheless useful as they illustrate how actors (politicians, analysts, and military leaders) can fail to see many, perhaps most, of the consequences of their actions. Lebow’s “close call” counterfactuals, on the other hand, are “minimal rewrites of history close to the event whose outcome we wish to mutate” and “make the case for the determining features of context”.<sup>13</sup>

Trying to classify the divisions of Germany and Korea as either close call or long-shot counterfactuals in relation to the start of the Cold War is an interesting prospect as the phrase “Cold War” refers more to a culture and within and a type of relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is impossible to give its beginning an exact date, as we can with, for example the beginning of World War I (28 July 1914 when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia). In fact, some might even protest the inclusion of the Korean division case here at all, arguing that no matter the difficulties involved in giving the Cold War a precise starting date, it was definitely well underway by 25 June 1950 when North Korean forces marched on their southern neighbor and the Korean War that would lead to the demise of any short-term plans for

---

<sup>12</sup> Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Korean unification began. The reasons for Korea's inclusion, in fact, hinge on a third type of counterfactual, second order counterfactuals, and will be explained in much more detail below. For now, it suffices to say that because neither the German case nor the Korean case requires enabling counterfactuals to move from their result to the start of the Cold War that this paper aims to modify, both cases will be treated as close call counterfactuals.

### **A. Why Use Counterfactuals?**

Counterfactuals are present in at least implied form in every causal argument, and their use can provide some of the best evidence for the correctness of a causal claim. Any phrase of the form “*x* caused *y*,” or even “*x* led to *y*,” “*x* influenced *y*,” “as a result of *x*, *y*” and the like carries with it its contrapositive “without *x* then not *y*” statement that forms the basis of any counterfactual argument. But most arguments do not start out assuming not-*x*, so most arguments relegate the counterfactual to the realm of the unspoken. As such, scholars from all disciplines are split as to the usefulness and validity of counterfactual arguments in general. Opinions range from those of deterministic historical purists who believe that scholars should not stray beyond the boundaries of what actually happened and that counterfactuals do not have a place in serious literature to that of other scholars that they are real tools of analysis to be taken seriously.

Until very recently, counterfactuals have not been welcomed into the historical – or, indeed, the political science or international relations – communities. In 1961, E.H. Carr, perhaps the best known critic of counterfactuals, issued his infamous critique of counterfactuals as mere parlor games unbecoming of a serious scholar, and was joined in his critique by many of his contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> This view is understandable in light of many of the early works of counterfactual history, which are perhaps the best argument against their own existence and

---

<sup>14</sup> Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 6.

make it very easy to see the merits of Carr's claim. Early counterfactuals lacked structure, contained inherently contradictory assumptions, or were simply exercises in wish fulfillment on the parts of their authors.<sup>15</sup> It has only been in the past few decades, with the development of rigorous methodologies for constructing counterfactuals, that they are starting to gain more legitimacy in the scholarly community. Lebow, writing in 2007, admitted that his counterfactual thought experiments were still considered a "provocation" by some of his peers.<sup>16</sup> Although there are still some who regard counterfactuals with suspicion, such arguments are increasingly being used to great effect by authors exploring such various topics as the rise of Western civilization and the start of World War I. Counterfactual history has even given rise to specialized subfields such as counter-narrative history and counterfactual historical geography.

Counterfactual reasoning of this sort is especially useful in studies of the Soviet Union, Western scholarly work on the Soviet Union, and therefore the Cold War in its entirety as well. Because the Soviet Union kept its documents classified for so long, counterfactual debates about Soviet actions and motivations that took place during the Cold War – especially regarding foreign policy – often rested on little to no foundation. Writing in the mid 1990s, George W. Breslauer lamented the relative lack of "empirical studies of Soviet behavior that allowed for strong counterfactuals".<sup>17</sup> Studies of American policies were substituted, aided by what little information could be gleaned from official Soviet announcements and from reading between the lines in *Pravda*, though they were "insufficiently 'hard' to provide the basis for a counterfactual

---

15 The canonical example of this, commonly called the "Cleopatra's nose" example, argues that had Cleopatra been uglier, World War II would not have happened. The multiple causal linkages between the two events make that outcome very unlikely, and this one of the most often-ridiculed examples of counterfactuals by critics such as Carr.

16 Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 3.

17 George W. Breslauer, "Counterfactual Reasoning in Western Studies of Soviet Politics and Foreign Relations," in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 81.

claim that had the United States behaved differently the Soviet Union would have been willing to reach an accommodation based on superpower collaboration”.<sup>18</sup> Now, two decades after the end of the Cold War, the release of memoirs and archival information has provided much of the data necessary for effectively supporting and properly explaining many of the counterfactual questions that had previously been used to frame the Cold War origins debate but had never been able to be answered without an (unavoidable) bias to the Western position and viewpoint due to the disproportionate reliance on Western sources. Due to limited data, the counterfactual claims put forward depended almost entirely on “the analyst’s theoretical apparatus, cognitive imagery, or philosophy of history”.<sup>19</sup> So claims and their justifications varied widely depending on the person advocating them, with no balanced evidence to back them up. Thus, “the limit of the claim typically stopped with the assertion that it did not necessarily have to turn out that way”.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, the new information from the Soviet archives mean that our claims no longer have to stop there and, in fact, *should* not stop there. We now have the information necessary to trace out multiple possible futures, some seriously considered as alternatives by those in power, and some that never had the chance to be fully developed. In short, we are now able to go beyond what might have happened and talk about what would have happened.

### **B. Plausible World Counterfactuals**

Both close call and long shot counterfactuals can take place in one of two worlds: “plausible” or “miracle”. Plausible world counterfactuals are meant to be realistic: they should “not violat[e] our understanding of what was technologically, culturally, temporally, or otherwise possible”. These counterfactuals are employed in cases that “have a significant probability of

---

18 Breslauer, “Western Studies of Soviet Politics,” 81-2.

19 Ibid., 83.

20 Ibid.

leading to the alternative outcome – and one we want to bring about”.<sup>21</sup> Miracle world counterfactuals, in contrast, require the assistance of some outside event to make the initial change possible: an evolutionary miracle to make the Black African population of Darfur dolphins in the introduction to Philip Tetlock and Richard Belkin's *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, or a total erasure of nearly a hundred years of scientific advancement to get rid of (and prevent the eventual development of) nuclear weapons in John Mueller's “The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World”. Counterfactuals of this sort are “essential tools in developing and evaluating competing historical and political interpretations and theories”.<sup>22</sup> However, for the purposes of interrogating the causes of the Cold War, plausible world counterfactuals will be used. History makes it clear that there were no shortage of opportunities for the unification of Germany and Korea to take place long before unification came about (or, in the Korean case, will potentially come about) in our world.

Part of the reason for the increased respectability of counterfactuals discussed above is the increased amount of structure developed for forming counterfactual arguments. The development of tests for the plausibility and relevance of counterfactual situations, and for the validity of the turning points that are changed in order to create the counterfactual situation have given those who work with counterfactual arguments a solid methodological basis for the first time. But counterfactuals are, by their very nature, unpredictable, and scholars disagree about how and to some degree *when* they should be used.

This has led most authors who work with counterfactuals to develop similar but distinct

---

21 Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 44-5.

22 *Ibid.*, 46.

sets of test criteria for their counterfactual cases in order to evaluate which ones should be used and what the goals of such use should be. We have already seen the first two criteria used for plausible world counterfactuals (i.e., they should be realistic and lead to our desired outcome). In doing this study, I will mostly be following the methodology laid out by Lebow in *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations*, as it is both the most recent and the most comprehensive, bringing together several previously enumerated lists as well as new additions by Lebow.<sup>23</sup> Lebow's list contains nine separate tests for justifying plausible world counterfactuals. These are: realism, clarity, logical consistency or cotenability, enabling counterfactuals (if any) that do not undercut the antecedent, historical consistency, theoretical consistency, avoidance of the conjunction fallacy, recognition of the interconnectedness of causes and outcomes, and consideration of second order counterfactuals.<sup>24</sup>

Realism is, in essence, a formal way of getting rid of such patently ridiculous counterfactuals as Napoleon having an atomic bomb at his disposal during the battle of Waterloo. If we want our counterfactuals to have merit, “we must have compelling mechanisms to bring [good counterfactuals] into being that require only plausible rewrites of history. Moreover, these rewrites must be consistent with the pattern of decisions or behavior that follow from the counterfactuals themselves”<sup>25</sup>. The clarity test is an admonition to the author to, when crafting their causal arguments, “define as unambiguously as possible what is to be explained (the consequent in counterfactual arguments), what accounts for this outcome (the antecedent), and the chain of logic linking the two” and to “specify the conditions that would have to be present

---

23 Criteria 2, 3, 5, and 6 on Lebow's list were first proposed by Tetlock and Belkin in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*; criterion 7 was proposed by Tetlock separately; criteria 1, 4, 8, and 9 were proposed for the first time by Lebow in *Forbidden Fruit*.

24 Ibid., 54-7.

25 Ibid., 54.

for the antecedent to occur”.<sup>26</sup> Meeting this condition makes it much easier to meet the next two conditions, which deal with how to define good antecedents. The third test, for logical consistency and cotenability, states that “the antecedent should not undercut any of the principles linking it to the consequent,” as counterfactuals that are not internally consistent cannot obtain external validity.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the test for historical consistency asserts that “the *nature* of the changes made by the experiment are [...] more important than the *number* of changes,” that is, several plausible rewrites will lead to a more plausible world than one plausible rewrite that requires multiple (perhaps less-plausible) enabling counterfactuals.<sup>28</sup> The test for theoretical consistency, Lebow suggests, is less applicable to counterfactuals in political science or international relations because “there are [no] generally accepted [theories] in international relations, comparative politics, or history”.<sup>29</sup> I disagree: the reason no international relations theories can be considered generally accepted is because there are quite simply too many competing for attention at the moment and that makes it more important than ever that the implications of the major theories for one’s counterfactual argument be considered. Theories used should be referenced, and if one or more theories completely discount the possibility of one’s counterfactual situation coming about, that should be noted as well. The test for avoidance of conjunction fallacy reminds us of “the laws of statistics that suggests that the probability of a compound counterfactual is exceedingly low”.<sup>30</sup> This is one of the reasons that long-shot counterfactuals and close-call counterfactuals that require many enabling counterfactuals are inherently less plausible. The further away we are temporally from the consequent, and the more

---

26 Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 55.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 56.

30 Ibid.

variables we need to keep track of, the less likely it is that we will be able to assert that any antecedent will produce a specific consequence. Test eight, relating to the interconnectedness of causes and outcomes, establishes exacting standards of specificity in forming counterfactual arguments. In order to meet these, the argument “must specify, within reason, what else is likely to change as a result of the hypothesized antecedent, and consider how the change that appears the most important (a choice that also requires elaboration) might influence the probability of the consequent”.<sup>31</sup> This avoids such improbable leaps of logic as, for example, the Soviet Union putting conventional missiles in Cuba in Mueller’s world without nuclear weapons counterfactual. Finally, Lebow requires that second-order counterfactuals, “subsequent developments [that] will return history more or less to the course from which it was initially diverted by the antecedent,” be considered.<sup>32</sup> Similar to the previous test, this recognizes the complex interplay between causes and effects and is a test to ensure that all potential effects, not just those beneficial to one’s argument, be considered.

Additionally, I will make use of several tests that Breslauer considers useful for evaluating counterfactuals relating specifically to the unique case of the Soviet Union, one of the major actors in this paper’s argument. While he agrees with the majority of Lebow’s conditions above, he believes they need to be modified in order to account for the “combination of data scarcity and theoretical-analogical uncertainty [that made] it hard to define the character and political dynamics of the [Soviet] system and to distinguish the genetic from the developmental features of the system as it evolved over time” that differentiate counterfactual reasoning about Soviet affairs from that about those of other countries or systems.<sup>33</sup> These standards, which

---

31 Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 57.

32 Ibid.

33 Breslauer, “Western Studies of Soviet Politics,” 73-4.

“attempt to restrict counterfactual analysis to the explanation of fairly time-bound, discrete historical sequences” are no longer as necessary to Soviet-related counterfactuals as they were in 1996, however, they deserve consideration. Breslauer has one set of criteria to compensate for the data scarcity, which he borrows from Jon Elster, H. Stuart Hughes, and Lance Davis: “The counterfactual antecedent must have been an available option, considered but rejected; the consequent stand in relatively close temporal proximity to the antecedent; and the focus should be on identification of the *decisive* factor in a historical sequence”. Breslauer also suggests an emphasis on “explicit theory, carefully specified to conform to actual initial conditions,” with the theory being “weak enough to admit the counterfactual assumption, and also strong enough to permit a clear-cut conclusion”.<sup>34</sup> These tests constitute somewhat less stringent variants on criteria from Lebow’s list, though are sufficiently strong enough to justify counterfactual arguments on their own. As our knowledge of the Soviet Union has increased rapidly over the years since Breslauer outlined these criteria and theories have become more refined, every effort will be made to meet the more rigorous conditions, in certain areas explained below the Breslauer tests will be used instead.

In the following two sections, I will show that both the creation of a unified Germany and the creation of a unified Korea meet all of these tests.

## V. UNIFIED GERMANY AS A PLAUSIBLE WORLD COUNTERFACTUAL

This section goes through each of the tests discussed above and shows that German reunification meets the standards necessary to be considered as a plausible world counterfactual.

{1} *Realism*. Occupation of Germany by the Allied powers was never intended to be

---

34 Breslauer, “Western Studies of Soviet Politics,” 73-4.

permanent, and division of Germany was never intended to happen. There is a wealth of documentation on both the American and Soviet sides of policymakers pushing for a united Germany while the country was still under military occupation, and for reunification after the establishment of West and East Germany. The specific documents will be discussed in great detail later on, but the presence of alternatives to division that were considered and rejected by all parties involved easily meets both Breslauer's and Lebow's standards for realistic counterfactuals.

{2} *Clarity.* In unambiguously defining this counterfactual's antecedent (unified Germany) and consequent (the Cold War), the first part of this test has been met. Showing the chain of logic linking the two, and defining what conditions must have been necessary to bring about a united Germany, are tasks for Chapter 2.

{3} *Logical consistency or cotenability.* As a test of the argument constructed, rather than the premise, proof of satisfaction of this condition will also be set aside until Chapter 2.

{4} *Enabling counterfactuals do not undercut the antecedent.* This condition is met by considering only alternatives to the eventual German division that American and Soviet leaders of the 1940s and 1950s considered.

{5} *Historical consistency.* This condition is trivially met by meeting conditions three and four above: if the counterfactual and is not contradicted by its enabling counterfactuals, it is historically consistent.

{6} *Theoretical consistency.* Theories used in evaluating the German case will center mostly on relationships between occupying powers and their subjects up until the declarations of statehood, and on relationships between superpowers and their smaller allies after that, with

focus on how leaders of smaller allies can manipulate their superpower allies to achieve their own aims. These will be used to show how, on occasions, the German leaders were able to encourage their superpower allies to pursue more aggressive policies to create and continue the Cold War, which they would not have been able to do had they been ruling a united Germany.

{7} *Avoid the conjunction fallacy.* This condition is met as I will be showing a direct link between antecedent (unified Germany) and consequent (Cold War) and this is not a compound counterfactual.

{8} *Recognize the interconnectedness of causes and outcomes.* This is not so much a test of the premise of a counterfactual argument, but an instruction for the counterfactual narrative of history produced as part of the process of making a counterfactual argument. As such, it can be declared to have been met only after the argument has been concluded, and as I trace each possible narrative in Chapter 2, I will show that this standard has been met.

{9} *Consider second order counterfactuals.* As neither the Americans, nor the Germans, nor the Soviets wanted to establish two German states immediately after World War II – two-state policy was gradually formed and often refined – it is highly unlikely that, had Germany successfully been unified immediately after World War II, anything could have persuaded or allowed the powers involved to split Germany after a pan-German government had been established. Having a unified Germany also removes many of the defining features of what we call the Cold War: the Berlin Wall, the Berlin airlift, Walter Ulbricht's influence over Kremlin foreign policy. The one event of enough import and independence to both exist simultaneously with a unified Germany and to create a Cold War culture is the division of Korea, which will be dealt with extensively.

## VI. UNIFIED KOREA AS A PLAUSIBLE WORLD COUNTERFACTUAL

This section goes through each of the tests discussed above and shows that Korean reunification meets the standards necessary to be considered as a plausible world counterfactual. Many of these standards are met for the same reasons their counterparts in the German case are met, in those cases I have noted that fact but, in the interests of space and avoiding redundancy, have not repeated the reasoning.

{1} *Realism*. The Korean case meets this standard by virtue of the same facts that allow the German case to meet it: occupation was not meant to be permanent, and was in fact not an original goal. Alternatives were considered at virtually every turn, thus this counterfactual satisfies the realism test.

{2} *Clarity*. In unambiguously defining this counterfactual's antecedent (unified Korea) and consequent (the Cold War), the first part of this test has been met. Showing the chain of logic linking the two, and defining what conditions must have been necessary to bring about a united Korea, are tasks for Chapter 3.

{3} *Logical consistency or cotenability*. As a test of the argument constructed, rather than the premise, proof of satisfaction of this condition will also be set aside until Chapter 3.

{4} *Enabling counterfactuals do not undercut the antecedent*. This is met by virtue of the same reasoning used with the German case.

{5} *Historical Consistency*. As in the German case, this condition is met by meeting conditions three and four.

{6} *Theoretical Consistency*. Theories of ally relationships will be considered here, as in the German case. However, because Korea was a liberated colony and Germany a former aggressor, I will also be looking at literature dealing with great power attitudes toward

decolonization, and their relationships with East Asian countries in particular in order to identify factors substantially differentiating the Korean case from the German one.

{7} *Avoid the conjunction fallacy.* This condition is met due to unambiguous definition of antecedent and consequent and, additionally, it will be shown in Chapter 4 that no other condition on its own could lead to the Cold War.

{8} *Recognize the interconnectedness of causes and outcomes.* As with the German case, this standard will be proven to have been met after possible narratives of Korean unification had been constructed in Chapter 3.

{9} *Consider second order counterfactuals.* We are once again faced with a situation in which it would be virtually impossible, not to mention illegal, to re-divide Korea had a pan-Korean government been successfully established at the end of the trusteeship period or before the declarations of separate statehood. However, I divide the Korean case into *two* cases: unification in 1948 and unification in 1953 after the Korean War. It is possible that a Korean civil war could have occurred between communists and anti-communists even after the establishment of a pan-Korean government, so the 1953 case is really a second-order counterfactual to the 1948 case.

## VII. LEVELS OF CONTINGENCY: TURNING POINTS

Now that we have established that a unified Germany and a unified Korea are plausible worlds, we must choose how to explain the potential formations of such states. In order to do so, we identify certain “turning points,” or “locations where causal chains converge [...] or at which developments in which one is interested undergo exponential amplification”.<sup>35</sup> Specifically, for

---

<sup>35</sup> Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 58.

this paper, turning points are moments in time where the establishment of a unified German state or a unified Korean state – with any alignment, and by any means – was most likely to occur. Turning points, like counterfactuals as a whole, have sets of criteria that can be used to judge their validity. Lebow phrases these criteria as questions “designed to give claims of contingency greater apparent external validity”: What do we have to do to negate a turning point? How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point? How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites? At what level of analysis are our rewrites plausible? How redundant is the turning point? What about second order counterfactuals?<sup>36</sup>

The answers to these questions give us information about “the relative importance of systemic and non-systemic factors in particular historical events or developments” and “allow a more fine-grained analysis of key components of key causal chains”.<sup>37</sup> Lebow, arguing from his experience using these questions to identify turning points in the rise of western civilization in *Unmaking the West: “What If?” Counterfactuals that Remake World History* suggests that each of the questions should be answered using counterfactuals that comply with the nine criteria for plausible world counterfactuals listed above. I take a slightly different view, however. Not all of these questions require a full counterfactual argument to be answered properly, especially when we are dealing with counterfactuals for events rather than processes. In the case of questions one (negating turning points) and five (redundancy of turning points), both can be answered for the German and Korean counterfactuals by looking at documentation of other options considered by leaders at the time or the number of times a particular solution was proposed to resolve the Korean or German Questions – in other words, using the existence rather than the result of a

---

<sup>36</sup> Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, 59-63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, 64.

counterfactual to evaluate the validity of a turning point.

This section will focus on laying out a brief overview of the situations in Germany and Korea immediately post-World War II and the major turning points in the time leading up to their divisions. Chapter 2 will discuss each of the German turning points in detail and subject them to Lebow's six questions about external validity, and Chapter 3 will do the same for the Korean turning points.

### **A. Turning Points in Germany**

When Germany was first occupied by the four Allied powers at the end of World War II, its semi-permanent division into two states was not desired nor even considered by most of the Allied leaders. Immediate efforts were focused on extracting reparations and de-Nazifying Germany, and the zones were the economic-administrative way to ensure that each of the Allies could obtain their share of the reparations owed. Some level of economic and military cooperation among the occupiers was taken for granted, though in principle the cooperation was greatest between the American and British zones and least between the French (and later the Soviet) zone and all others. Despite this, the administrative divisions did not significantly negatively impact the day to day lives of German citizens until much later. In fact, when the zones were first established, "passage across the East-West frontier was in fact far easier for the Germans than for the occupying troops".<sup>38</sup>

Even after the proclamation of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany as two separate states, German nationalism and optimistic views of the inevitability of each country's rise on the parts of not only the countries themselves but those of

---

38 J.P. Nettl, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany, 1945-50*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1951): 260.

the United States and the Soviet Union as well meant that reunification policy was still a contested matter well into the 1950s. As late as November 1955, Molotov was proposing that “the Soviet line on German talks should accept the basics of the Eden Plan,” gambling that the West – specifically, the United States – would never agree to the removal of West Germany from NATO that that plan called for.<sup>39</sup> His proposal was given extra weight by the fact that Austria had just signed a treaty exchanging its American-French-Soviet-British occupiers for perpetually neutral statehood. When Khrushchev killed that proposal, it was clear that “the GDR, once an instrument of Soviet goals in Europe, had become a major Soviet asset and not available for bargaining”.<sup>40</sup> Going forward, the preservation of East German sovereignty would be a non-negotiable point for the Kremlin. The division of Germany was not going to be resolved in the foreseeable future and the Cold War culture was firmly in place and poised to continue for just as long.

The state of flux that consumed the German states in the first ten years after the conclusion of World War II means that we have no shortage of turning points to choose from. As such, we must carefully justify each turning point chosen and explain why it is more important to our counterfactual than other possible points. In this section I will list and briefly describe the turning points, but I will leave the justifications for Chapter 2..

The original plan for German occupation was developed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Josef Stalin, and Winston Churchill at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. This agreement provided for a temporary division of Germany into three administrative zones to be overseen by the Americans, British, and Soviets (a fourth occupation zone for France was later created from

---

39 Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007): 108.

40 Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 109.

the British and American zones). Few specifics were decided at Yalta, the intermediate wartime conference between the Allied leaders, and it was more of a chance for each leader to lay out his vision of postwar Eastern and Central Europe than it was a time to make concrete decisions. However, the Yalta conference did establish a Committee on Dismemberment of Germany, which was to evaluate several different possible divisions of Germany as a way to punish the nation. However, before the end of 1945, the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union had all renounced the punitive dismemberment of Germany.<sup>41</sup>

Division, however, remained a perfectly acceptable alternative, especially as the United States Army was distrustful of any sort of joint occupation plan that would require its officers to take on any civilian or administrative roles. Thus, when President Truman, Prime Minister Attlee, and Commissar Stalin and their staffs failed to come to any agreement over reparations portions from all of Germany, American Secretary of State Byrnes proposed a plan that treated each occupation zone as a discrete economic entity, allowing each occupying country to take whatever it wanted out of its own zone for reparations. Division, rather than unity, was the basis of the final communique from Potsdam, despite its nominal hopes for a unified German state at some point in the future. Had an agreement been reached that treated all of Germany as an economic whole, the foundation for all future negotiations would have been radically different, and forced the occupiers to come to real tripartite (later quadripartite) agreements on Germany that preserved the country's economic and political unity. This scenario of a different Potsdam Agreement forms the basis of our first set of German counterfactuals.

Relations between the occupation zones were, while not excellent, at least an

---

41 Philip E. Mosely, "Dismemberment of Germany: The Allied Negotiations from Yalta to Potsdam," *Foreign Affairs* 28 (April 1950): 487

improvement over the ministerial-level relations between the occupying powers over the later years of the 1940s. As the Council of Foreign Ministers became further and further deadlocked over the wording of the peace treaty with Germany and the fate of the country after its occupiers had left, the occupation commanders were making real progress in the Allied Control Council, developing a level of industry plan to restore Germany's devastated economy and holding its first post-war democratic elections in the occupation zones and in the free city of Berlin. Much of the cooperation, however, was only surface level while underlying disagreements about reparations prevented the occupying powers from making any real progress towards unifying Germany at an economic or a national political level. Frustrated with the slow pace of events and with what he perceived to be the occupation command's overly pro-Soviet stance, Secretary Byrnes offered immediate economic unification and a merger of occupation zones to any willing power at the Paris Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in 1946. When the British accepted, not only did they help create a whole new institution that would be a problem for national reunification, but they gave the Soviet Union an increasingly hostile Anglo-American zone across the middle of Germany. The development of the Anglo-American Bizone that became effective on January 1, 1947 pushed Germany towards its future division into West-East blocs that mirrored the increasing solidification of all of Europe into equivalent blocs. Preventing the formation of the Bizone helps to prevent the development of these East-West blocs in Germany and Europe, and thus forms the basis of our second set of German counterfactuals.

After the formation of the Bizone, the State Department began to actively pursue a policy that they had long considered but rejected: working for the formation of a separate West German state to integrate into the slowly recovering West European economy. Doing so, they

rationalized, would not only help their Western European allies, but restrict Soviet Communist influence in the West. Such a policy would, of course, be unacceptable to the Soviets and also, more unfortunately, to most of the West German political leaders who were dissatisfied with the extent to which the Americans were interfering with their country. Nevertheless, the United States began looking for an excuse to break off all negotiations with the Soviets over the Allied occupation and create West Germany in a way that would ensure the support of both the British and, crucially the French (the Soviets, it should be noted, did not exactly go out of their way to avoid providing the Americans with such an excuse). The symbolic diplomatic severance happened at the London Conference of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting in late 1947, which the Americans, British, and French promptly followed with a Three-Power conference to lay out their goals for West Germany. Had the United States chosen not to pursue a policy of division, or had it been unable to gain the approval of its Western European allies, they would not have been able to divide Germany the way they did. These scenarios form the basis for our third set of German counterfactuals.

Before the formal establishment of West Germany, however, came the Soviet retaliation for the failure of the London CFM meeting and the results of the following Three-Power Conference, which they understandably viewed as a betrayal, in the form of a months-long blockade of the Western sectors of Berlin. The blockade rapidly became a propaganda rallying point for politicians on both sides of the issue. But far beyond the propaganda blitz, the biggest effect of the Berlin blockade was the involve of outside actors both new and old. The United Nations became involved at the request of the United States, and familiar faces started to resurface at the State Department as well, all advocating for a compromise that did not involve

the division of Germany. It is a mark of growing American global power that they were able to successfully resist all calls for compromise from both inside and outside their government, and force the British and the French to reject them as well. When the blockade fell, it took with it all hopes of stopping the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany. But it did not have to, and that scenario forms the basis for our fourth and final set of German counterfactuals.

### **B. Turning Points in Korea**

The case of Korea is interesting because although the two Koreas were legally established before the two Germanys, that division via competing declarations of statehood is often overshadowed by a second division: the division via the ceasefire treaty that ended the Korean War in 1953. My argument will address both of these cases in turn, offering counterfactuals that prevent the 1948 division and that prevent or alter the outcome of the Korean War that caused the second division.

The 1948 division results in a counterfactual situation that evolves very similarly to the German case. Thus, part of the chapter on Korea looks comparatively at the path toward division taken by Germany and Korea, and at the connections – or rather, the lack of connections – that Soviet and American officials were making between the two cases. It argues that no matter what happened in Germany, preventing the division of Korea in 1948 would be sufficient to prevent the Cold War.

The Korean case begins almost identically to the German case: the country was divided roughly in half in order for the victorious allies to oversee the surrender of a defeated power. In Korea, that power was Japan, Korea's former colonizer, and the dividing line was along the 38th parallel, a relatively arbitrary choice by U.S. State Department officials Dean Rusk and Charles

Bonesteel to facilitate the somewhat reluctant occupation of Korea by Allied troops. Korea was initially placed under military trusteeship while attempts were made to organize an independent pan-Korean government to take office after what would ideally be a five year period of trusteeship. But disagreements between the occupying powers and Korean officials over the length and nature of the trusteeship, as well as between the United States and the Soviet Union over when and how elections in Korea should take place prevented the formation of a united Korean government. In 1948 Kim Il-Sung, chairman of the Provisional People's Committee became head of the Soviet-friendly North Korean state and Syngman Rhee, former president of the Korean government-in-exile took over leadership of the American-supported South Korean state.

The countries remained divided along the 38th parallel until the Korean Armistice Agreement that ended hostilities in the Korean War in 1953. This agreement established the Military Demarcation Line and the demilitarized zone enclosing the two kilometers on either side of it as the *de facto* border between the two nations. Although the armistice provided for a future "final peaceful settlement" between the two governments (following on from the armistice itself which, as a military cease-fire agreement included only non-binding "recommendations to the governments concerned on both sides"), no such settlement has been reached and the two nations remain effectively at war with each other.<sup>42</sup>

For all the similarities between the German and Korean postwar occupations, there was remarkably little effort on either the American or Soviet sides to use either nation in their plans for obtaining unification of the other. This can be explained to some extent by the fact that

---

<sup>42</sup> Korean War Armistice Agreement, July 27, 1953; Treaties and Other International Agreements Series #2782; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

Germany and Korea were identified with wildly disparate security interests and had very different roles during World War II and will be further discussed in later chapters, but for now it is enough to understand that such a distinction existed, and is a factor in choosing turning points leading up to the Korean division.

Upon their arrival in Korea, the Americans and Soviets found a functioning, if weak, government in the form of the leftist Korean Peoples' Republic (KPR) which was running the country through a vast network of people's committees. The Soviets let the KPR continue to function in the North with little supervision, while the Americans quickly moved to abolish it in the South, thereby destroying one of the greatest similarities between the zones. Had they not, there would have been a much better base from which to build unification efforts, and that scenario forms the basis of our first set of Korean counterfactuals.

Communication between the occupying commands on the ground in Korea was more limited than it was in Germany, and largely restricted to the joint American-Soviet military commission that was overseeing the reorganization of Korean politics, established in December 1945 as part of the Moscow Conference. There were plenty of opportunities for it to become a functional body (the exact opposite of what it was), but ideological considerations and entanglement with Korean factions prevented that. Alternate ways of dealing with the Joint Commission are the basis of our second set of Korean counterfactuals.

The non-functionality of the Joint Commission resulted in United Nations intervention at the Americans' request. After deliberations and observations in the American occupation zone (they were denied entry to the Soviet Zone on the grounds that they lacked jurisdiction) the members of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea decided that elections for a

government could go forward in the south regardless of what happened in the north. Thus they were responsible for allowing the formation of two different Korean states, and had they made a different choice, Korea would not have been divided in this way in 1948. This forms the basis of our third set of Korean counterfactuals.

Finally, we consider the Korean War as a turning point. The war, which lasted from 1950 to 1953, was the post-division event most responsible for shaping the relationship between the two Koreas and in defining their relationships and importance to their respective great power allies. Had the war been prevented, or had the outcome been altered, the state of Korea and of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States would have been radically different. It is these changes to the war that form the basis of our fourth set of Korean counterfactuals.

### **C. Case Interdependency**

The divisions of Korea and Germany were both symbolic of and caused by the rapidly worsening relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In choosing these turning points leading up to each division, I have attempted to stay compliant with Lebow's tests for choosing plausible and effective turning points, and will subject each of them to the tests in chapters two and three. As part of the decision to focus on two cases – that is, two causes of the Cold War – I also needed to make the decision as to how many sub-cases each of them would entail. Two countries plus two states of division for each country plus three possible alignments for one of those states for each country yields sixteen possibilities. Adding in the fact that each of these outcomes could originate from each of eight turning points (four for each country) the number of cases becomes, quite frankly, unmanageable.

Fortunately, not all of these cases need to be discussed. The level to which Germany's

1949 division was contingent on the 1948 division of Korea is minimal, and the level to which Korea's post-civil war division in 1953 was is debatable. The pairings listed above presuppose a level of interconnectedness between Korea and Germany that American and Soviet policymakers did not see. Although there are minor cases of acts in one country affecting the other – for instance, when Secretary Byrnes was rebuked for making concessions to the Soviets on Korea at the Moscow Conference in 1945, he subsequently tended to take a harder line on the German issues – the cases were seen to be entirely distinct entities whose divided or unified status did not noticeably affect the divided or unified state of the other. The policymakers involved in those divisions overwhelmingly saw the cases as evolving in parallel, rather than in tandem, largely because, as we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, it was the military commanders in Korea and Germany and their relationships with the State Department back home that contributed most to the divisions, rather than State Department policies in isolation. As such, in keeping with the suggestion that counterfactuals considered only be options open to or considered by actors at the time, I have made the decision to treat the case of Germany in one chapter, and that of Korea in another, with minimal overlap between the two, and only consider the cases together in the conclusion. The sole exception to this is the Korean elections turning point, where the question of how the United Nations handled the question of where and how to hold elections in Korea would affect how officials there dealt with the Berlin blockade and division of Germany. This will be handled in chapter 3, which deals with Korea.

## **VIII. ROADMAP**

The rest of the paper will proceed as follows.

Chapter 2 focuses on the case of Germany, going into much greater detail about the turning points enumerated above. The possible alignments of a unified Germany (U.S./Western-allied, neutral, or Soviet/Eastern allied) will be laid out, along with primary source documentation showing the amount of consideration given to each by American and Soviet leaders during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Based on these, the alignments will be assigned relative probabilities and the likelihood of a Cold War culture developing from each will be evaluated.

Chapter 3 focuses on the case of Korea. As in the German case, the first step is to discuss in proper detail the major turning points. Then the level of the Korean case's dependence on the outcome of the German case will be analyzed, as will the level of the Korean case's dependence on a pre-existing state of Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The possible alignments of a unified Korea at each of the turning points will be considered, and for the second-latest turning point – the Korean elections – the impact the Korean situation would have on Germany, and I will demonstrate that although a unified Korea could be only Soviet aligned or neutral, that is sufficient to prevent the Cold War.

Chapter 4, the conclusion, will discuss the implications this theory of the origin of the Cold War has for future studies not only of the Cold War, but of superpower-superpower relations. Taking the Cold War as an extended territorial dispute between superpowers over two contested countries removes much of the ideologically-charged language from the direct center of the origins debate, while acknowledging that ideology played an important role in creating the conditions that allowed these disputes to spiral into global conflict. However, even with ideology removed as a direct cause, proponents of the Cold War as an inevitable conflict are still left with

other possible causes, as discussed in the literature survey above. But showing that the Cold War was contingent on two specific events that need not have happened calls into question theories of international relations that predict inevitable conflict between states of any type or of superpowers in particular. In this chapter, I will also comment in more detail about the counterfactual methodology used in this project, and evaluate its usefulness in future studies of the Cold War and in political science studies generally.

## CHAPTER 2: GERMANY

### I. INTRODUCTION

In Germany, General Eisenhower's army enjoyed several advantages over his counterpart General John A. Hodge's XXIV Corps in Korea. Germany was very clearly a defeated enemy and was to be occupied and treated as such (without the ambiguity that attended Korea's place as part of the Japanese empire). Eisenhower and his deputy, eventual Military Government commander General Lucius Clay, formed good working relationships and even personal friendships with their Soviet counterparts, General Georgy Zhukov and Marshal Vasily Sokolovsky, relationships Hodge never managed to create with General Chistiakov. And Germany's central place during the wartime conferences meant that the occupation commanders had a mandate at least somewhat clearer than the officers in Korea.

The occupation also came with its own set of difficulties, however. The presence of four occupying powers instead of two added complexity, as did the decision to treat the ostensibly Soviet-zone capital city of Berlin as virtually a fifth occupation zone – a separate entity with the headquarters of all four powers stationed there. And, of course, Germany's placement as a central country in Europe and status as a defeated enemy placed it firmly in the middle of everyone's security concerns, something that could not be said for the much more peripheral Korea.

#### A. Wartime Planning

For much of the time the U.S. was involved in World War II, it was the American position that Germany should be divided after its defeat. This was indicative not only of President Roosevelt's personal desire to see Germany subjected to a harsh peace, but of the Western European countries' (especially France's) fears of a resurgent Germany the likes of which the

world saw after World War I. This policy was officially laid out in a U.S. Treasury document drafted by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. and his assistants, “Suggested Post-Surrender Program for Germany”. Morgenthau and his men were some of the last remaining New Deal liberals, whose “overriding foreign policy objective was the obliteration of fascism [...] Most emphasized, as well the extension of the U.S.-Soviet alliance”.<sup>43</sup> This first objective was obvious in the colloquially-named “Morgenthau Plan”. Under that plan, Germany “would be demilitarized by eliminating its armed forces, its entire weapons industry, and parts of its 'supporting industries'. Germany would be divided into two large autonomous states with large slices of territory removed from its jurisdiction. The Ruhr would be taken over by an international security organization that would own and control the major industrial properties to stop them from contributing to Germany's military potential. The whole country would provide reparations that would come not from current production but from 'the transfer of existing resources and territories’”.<sup>44</sup> Mentions of the U.S.-Soviet alliance and of the plan's implications for its continuance past the point of victory were absent, though when President Roosevelt used the Morgenthau plan as the basis for the American position at the 1944 Quebec Conference, he did so with the understanding that “the key to world peace was a continuing friendship with the Soviets, which would be solidified by a tough stand toward the Germans”.<sup>45</sup> Morgenthau's plan, in stripping Germany of territory and resources and essentially reducing its economy to a pastoral/agrarian level, certainly qualified as such a “tough stand” and had the added benefit of lining up with the president's personal feelings.

But as news of the Quebec Conference broke, Roosevelt was sharply criticized by the

---

43 Carolyn Woods Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32.

44 *Ibid.*, 37.

45 *Ibid.*, 46.

press for allowing his Treasury Secretary to set American foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> Such responsibility should instead lie with the State and War Departments. It was in those departments that the administration's conservatives were strongest and it was from there that they launched their own plans for post-war Germany to compete with Morgenthau for the president's loyalty. Two of the most visible members of this group were Assistant Secretary of State for War Jack McCloy and Secretary of War Harry Stimson. The plan for postwar Germany that the conservatives produced, JCS 1067, was a curious mix of appeasement for the liberals (since that was the camp Roosevelt was most aligned with) and disagreement with the liberals' key belief that a weak Germany was best (it was their own position that Germany should be strengthened and integrated into a West European capitalist economic system). Thus, JCS 1067 ended up a contradictory, loophole-filled document that did nothing to clarify American positions on key issues and much to eventually complicate the lives of Military Government officials in Germany as they tried to reach a settlement with their Soviet counterparts.<sup>47</sup>

### **B. The Yalta Conference and Shifting U.S. Policies**

Unfortunately for the futures of Germany and the Grand Alliance, this sort of indecisive and contradictory policymaking (on the part of all the Great Powers) would remain the same through the rest of the war and the occupation of Germany. This was especially evident at the Yalta conference, where procedures for dismantling Germany – the economy and the state – were discussed by the Big Three leaders. Churchill's distaste for the idea meant that the only reference to the dismemberment in the final communique from Yalta was in an amendment to the terms of

---

46 Arthur Krock, "Why Secretary Morgenthau Went to Quebec" *New York Times*, September 22, 1944. The piece by the conservative columnist was the first and most damaging of several that used the Quebec Conference to attack Roosevelt's leadership skills using the contradictory policies coming from administration officials.

47 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 51, 80-1, 226.

the German surrender document, which stated that the Allies would “take such steps, including the complete disarmament and the dismemberment of Germany as they deem requisite for future peace and security”.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the only decision reached on division at the Yalta Conference was to put off making a decision. Admittedly, this was consistent with the larger diplomatic purpose of Yalta: Germany was one of many issues discussed, and “the overall thrust of these deliberations was to find ways of reconciling differences, which could maintain a unified world order and prevent the formation of blocs”.<sup>49</sup> In providing for a unified, collaborative occupation of Germany, the negotiations over the German question played an integral part in laying down the foundations of that unified world. It is no surprise, therefore, that when the Yalta agreements on Germany began to break down in 1947 so too did the unified world order.

The breakdown in agreements started with an acrimonious turn to the reparations agreements, and soon spiraled from there. Like many issues at Yalta, the amount and nature of reparations each country would receive from a defeated Germany was not settled to any appreciable degree. Yalta “established a very ambiguous framework for addressing an inherently complex subject,” leaving questions of details with which to fill in that framework for a later day.<sup>50</sup> The protocol established a figure of \$20 billion in total reparations, with \$10 billion of that total going to the Soviet Union, as a basis for discussion, but put off deciding what would be taken out of which parts of Germany when and by whom. Reparations thus became another issue about which the fact that there was an agreement reached was far more important than the actual (lack of) substance of such an agreement.

---

48 “Protocol of Proceedings and Communiqué of the Yalta Conference,” in United States Department of State, ed, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945* Volume II: 1569.

49 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 61.

50 James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002), 80.

### **C. The Occupation Years**

That lack of substance would soon become a serious problem for General Clay and his subordinates in the military government. The early divisions in the Allied Control Council (ACC) were between the French and the other three powers, but the absence of clear directives for the acquisition of reparations, as well as acrimonious differences between the military, political, and economic advisors with the U.S. Military Government (USMG). Pre-victory planning had been carried out by officials who had never set foot in Germany, and the conflicts between the plans and the actual situation on the ground (for example, the denazification and de-cartelization programs would have necessitated getting rid of a large number of Nazis in positions useful to the U.S. and a number of businesses important to American financial interests) led to numerous petitions from General Clay and his political advisor, Robert Murphy, to change policy and, as the few responses received were often in the negative, Clay and Murphy's own modifications to policy. The poor communication (and occasional total lack of communication) between the USMG and the State Department did not only mean conflicting policies, however, it often meant conflicting relationships with the Americans' fellow occupiers.

These gaps were most apparent in issues of planning for the economy and unity of postwar Germany. At the outset, it was General Clay who was most concerned with maintaining a good working relationship with the Soviets. He acted as a mediator between the Soviets and the British on issues of steel production, between the Soviets and the French on the Ruhr and Rhineland, and between the Soviets and his own State Department on the timing and style of German elections. Meanwhile, the State Department and the White House were beginning to fall more and more in line with Moscow charge d'affaires George Kennan's anti-Soviet thinking. Kennan, who was predicting poor postwar behavior on the Soviets' part as early as January 1945,

proposed that the United States “immediately divide the country 'along the line of the Russian zone of occupation' and [...] make plans with the British for a West European federation that could incorporate the west German territory”.<sup>51</sup> This approach was “far outside the boundaries of official thinking” in the State Department, and Kennan was so mindful “of his own isolation that he intended to leave the Foreign Service at the end of the war”.<sup>52</sup> But as implementation of the Yalta and Potsdam protocols hit early snags in Germany, Kennan gained followers and incredible influence in policy formation in Washington. Ironically, by the time his anti-Soviet rhetoric and policies became mainstream thinking in American foreign policy, Kennan himself had done an about-face and would be an advocate for German unity and cooperation with the Soviets during the Berlin Blockade, opposing a General Clay who felt betrayed by his Soviet counterparts and was ready to cut them out from consideration of Germany's future.

Complicating matters were French domestic politics: when the French Communist Party (PCF) emerged as the largest single party after the 1945 elections, it set off several years of the United States trying to minimize the influence of French leftists on the international scene at the expense of the Soviet Union (while Georges Bidault, the foreign minister, modified the French position to placate the PCF), although the Soviets often occupied ideological positions on Germany closer to the U.S. than the French did. This led to a mostly-unofficial policy of choosing cooperation with the French whenever possible, and thereby intentionally or not antagonizing the Soviets, over true quadripartite efforts, though the level of support that received from officials varied. It is precisely because the shifts in personal policy on the part of American military and foreign policy elite were so numerous and so dramatic that there is room to play

---

51 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 55.

52 Ibid.

with alternate outcomes to the three years of negotiations over Germany's future.

#### **D. Roadmap**

Historically, Cold War scholarship from both orthodox and revisionist schools has tended to place the blame for the division of Germany and the ensuing (or perhaps concurrent) breakdown of U.S.-Soviet relations firmly on the side of the Soviet Union, citing Soviet meddling in the politics of the eastern occupation zone, inflexible negotiating position on reparations, and unwillingness to advance the German economy to the extent the Western powers wished at the speed that they desired.<sup>53</sup> Recent scholarship, such as Carolyn Eisenberg's *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949* and Hope M. Harrison's *Driving the Soviets Up The Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* are beginning to dispute that distribution of blame, drawing on recently declassified documents to illuminate the roles played by the Americans and Germans in bringing about the division. It is not the goal of this paper to assign total blame to any one side, but rather to examine moments at which different decisions by actors involved on all sides could have prevented the division of Germany. To that end, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to examining four turning points leading up to the establishment of separate states in East and West Germany: the reparations negotiations at the Potsdam Conference in July and August 1945, the merger of British and American occupation zones to create the Anglo-American Bizonia in 1947, the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in 1947 and the attendant debates over German policy in the French Assembly, and the Berlin Blockade in 1948.

---

<sup>53</sup> This is the position taken by most early orthodox literature and, outside the U.S., some recent works by scholars from former Soviet-bloc countries (such as Zubok) also identify the USSR as the cause of Germany's split, though for different reasons.

## II. TURNING POINT 1: THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE

### A. The Potsdam Conference in Our World

By the time of the Potsdam Conference, the much more detailed information the American political leadership was receiving from their ground forces in Germany had made on thing exceptionally clear: if the Americans were to have hope of getting any reparations at all from the destroyed German economy, they would need to move away from the much too high figure of \$20 billion adopted as a starting point at Yalta. As occupying troops entered Germany at the end of the war and observed the sorry state of German industry and the low standard of living in much of the country, there began to be serious concerns about the amount of reparations the country could realistically finance on its own: the occupying powers had no wish to end up paying for their own reparations.<sup>54</sup> Edwin Pauley, who had been in Moscow participating in reparations planning meetings, suggested that instead of focusing on the \$20 billion figure or, indeed, any fixed dollar amount, reparations be talked about in terms of percentages only. His Soviet negotiating partner, Ivan Maisky (former ambassador to London and at the time Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs) was dubious, asserting that under that scheme, the Soviets may well end up with a percent of nothing, and wondering why the Americans seemed more interested in rehabilitating the economy of their defeated enemy than that of their ally.<sup>55</sup>

Reparations negotiations at Potsdam began on 23 July with a meeting between Secretary Byrnes, his aide Charles (Chip) Bohlen, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, and his aide Mr. Pavlov. Byrnes told Molotov that the U.S. had “always favored and still favored the adoption of a friendly overall policy for the Three Powers which would treat Germany as an economic whole,” although “after listening to the discussions here and hearing the report of the

---

<sup>54</sup> Mee, *Meeting at Potsdam*, 126.

<sup>55</sup> Mee, *Meeting at Potsdam*, 189; Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 99.

Reparations Committee he did not see how certain of the positions taken by the Soviet Government could be reconciled with the adoption of an overall reparations plan” so perhaps consideration should be given to a plan where the Soviets took reparations only from their zone, with the possibility for inter-zonal exchanges.<sup>56</sup> Molotov, acting on orders from Stalin who “strongly favored' a unified, overall reparations plan for Germany,” countered by reducing the Soviet reparations claim to “8 ½ billion or 8 billion dollars, but [the Soviets] wanted to be certain of 2 billion dollars from the industrialized Ruhr”.<sup>57</sup>

Unwilling to make those assurances, the Western powers stalled negotiations until Byrnes, Molotov, and Bevin decided on a final reparations plan that did not treat Germany as a unit. Fundamentally, Byrnes divided Germany into East and West economically for purposes of reparations, and nothing more. But in trying to “prevent future conflicts among the allies over Germany by giving the Soviets a free hand to run their zone as they saw fit,” Byrnes caused “difficulties primarily because [the settlement's] true meaning was less than clear in the eyes of either the American occupation authorities in Germany or in the French, who had been excluded from the conference”.<sup>58</sup> The temporary economic division became a permanent economic division, and then a forty-year long political and legal one.

### **B. The Potsdam Conference as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate the turning point?* Negating the effects of the Potsdam reparations negotiations is relatively easy. Policy reversals by Military Government commanders or by the foreign ministers at their later conferences could create a unified

---

56 Charles Bohlen, “Byrnes-Molotov Meeting, Monday, July 23, 1945, 10:30 a.m.: Bohlen Minutes”, in Mee, *Meeting at Potsdam*, 191.

57 Mee, *Meeting at Potsdam*, 192-193.

58 McAllister, *No Exit*, 21-22.

economic plan for Germany.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* In order to prevent the Potsdam conference from taking place at all or to stall it, one would need to make multiple changes to the structure of World War II (such as ending the war much earlier or later) or to the wartime Big Three conferences preceding Potsdam. Since our focus is on the reparations portion of the Potsdam negotiations, those sorts of changes are realistically outside the scope of the exercise. Instead, we focus on altering the reparations negotiations: had Edwin Pauley taken a different line in the Moscow reparations committee, for instance, or had James Byrne been more willing to compromise on the Ruhr, a reparations plan that did not involve economic division could have been constructed. There were multiple points of flexibility immediately before and throughout the conference.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* The Potsdam conference was reflective of a very particular time period: the moment during which Germany was defeated but not yet handled, and Japan not yet defeated. Thus, we do not have to go back far at all to find credible places at which to rewrite the situations that produced the Potsdam reparations agreements: once we go further than the German surrender – and certainly once we go any further than Yalta – we have reached points where any rewrites change far too much to be useful for our purposes.

{4} *At what levels of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Rewrites of the Potsdam conference are most plausible on a personal level. The composition of the conference was the product of a very particular set of factors on that level: Roosevelt's death and the timing of the British elections put Harry Truman and Clement Attlee in Potsdam when they were not necessarily

expected to be there. However, in the interests of keeping these counterfactuals tightly focused, I will not attempt to change the presence of conference attendees. Rather, I will focus on the decisions of those individuals with the largest emotional stake in the reparations negotiations: Byrnes, Molotov, Truman, and Stalin.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* There are several linear chains of events needed to produce the outcome to the reparations negotiations that occurred at Potsdam. There is one needed to create the conference itself, as mentioned in the answer to question two, there is one needed to form the bargaining positions of each of the main participants in the reparations talks. Changes in any one of those chains could alter the outcome of the turning point.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* The reparations question may have been the biggest issue dividing East and West on the German question, but it was far from the only one (especially since it created divides within the Western powers as well). It was, however, the base issue from which other disagreements sprung, and it acted to magnify pre-existing ones. Keeping Germany economically unified at Potsdam is not a guarantor of permanent continued unification – there is the possibility of political issues becoming too divisive, or of the economic issues being reopened at a later date – but it does act to calm or negate the other co-temporal disputes. And any later issues that *did* arise would be doing so against a backdrop of already-completed detailed U.S.-Soviet agreements that would provide a model for peaceful mutual dispute solving.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

Consider a world in which Byrnes was willing to work with Molotov's offer to reduce the Soviet reparations claims to 8 billion dollars in exchange for the promise of 2 billion dollars from

an internationalized Ruhr. The overall amount of money demanded by the Soviets does not change, but the simple act of tying 20% of it to the Ruhr alters the nature of any future reparations talks, not least because the future of the Ruhr would be the cause for much debate throughout the entire course of the occupation in our world.

The Soviet occupation zone actually had less than 50% of Germany's wealth, which Byrnes refused to acknowledge even though the Soviets and his state department colleagues repeatedly provided him with the real figures.<sup>59</sup> Given Western reluctance to involve the Soviets in the Ruhr, the most damaged country ended up receiving the least in total reparations under the zonal plan, feeding resentment and forming the basis of the Soviets' hardline position on future economic negotiations. Economic unity at Potsdam helps reassure the Soviets that they would receive enough money and takes some of the pressure out of future economic talks.

Byrnes' stated goal of preventing future conflicts among the allies by preemptively dividing Germany economically reflected a pessimistic, anti-Soviet outlook that was both premature and not necessarily representative of the Truman administration's outlook as a whole at this point in time. But due to Truman's inexperience in foreign affairs, he was content to let Byrnes – whom he perceived as one of Roosevelt's closest confidantes and the “secret-keeper” of Yalta – do all of the real work at Potsdam.<sup>60</sup> This backfired fairly impressively: Byrnes had much less insight into Roosevelt's plans than Truman thought, and Truman had neither the experience nor the knowledge to see that the final Potsdam communique was based on Byrnes' desires, rather than Roosevelt's or his own. This early economic division did not merely *grant* the Soviets a free hand in their zone, it virtually *enforced* it by excluding them from the western zones.

<sup>59</sup> Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs William Clayton estimated that the Soviet zone had 40% of the moveable equipment, little of it the heavy industrial sort that the Soviets needed most. Pauley's slightly higher estimate of 45% still did not come close to meeting Soviet need. (*FRUS*, Potsdam II: 900, 917).

<sup>60</sup> McAllister, *No Exit*, 62.

When the Soviets began to use their freedom in arenas beyond the economic, however, the overwhelming Western response was to further isolate them, rather than try to find a quadripartite solution.

An all-German reparations plan at Potsdam is not equivalent to a politically unified Germany, of course. But there is a much straighter line from that all-German plan to a unified Germany than there is from the zonal plan to unification. What a unified plan does do is publicly reinforce the great powers' commitments not only to a unified Germany, but to each other. Thus, when the Soviets would later invoke the spirit or the letter of Potsdam in disagreements with the Western Powers, the United States could not rely on the loopholes that they did in our world. The spirit of the Potsdam agreement that was signed was division, and that specter would haunt all future four-power plans. Once divided for a central economic purpose – arguably, the central purpose of the entire occupation – it was difficult for other policies for unification – those that worked for or relied upon centralization – to take hold. The nature of the Potsdam plan thus became the nature of the occupation, and even minor plausible changes to the reparations clauses lead us to a world in which a unified, neutral Germany is created in a reasonable time and prevents the Cold War.

### **III. TURNING POINT 2: THE BIZONE**

#### **A. The Formation of the Bizone**

Much of the first two years of the occupation of Germany were characterized by the occupation officials in Germany coming close to important agreements before being impeded by political maneuverings in the capitals and in the Council of Foreign Ministers. In Berlin, General

Clay achieved some measure of success in getting the Soviets to agree to a level of industry plan, and in the beginning of 1946 and end to the reparations question appeared imminent. But the real test was yet to come: “the true measure of the Soviet attitude would be found not in their willingness to accept the Western offerings, but in how prepared they were to open up the eastern zone to the influence of their Allies”.<sup>61</sup> Rather than wait for the outcome of that test, however, the Americans at the Paris CFM meeting took a hard line toward the Soviets, offering economic reunification on a zone-by-zone basis to anyone whose government wished to accept it – but on terms patently unacceptable to the Soviets. The acrimonious and inconclusive ending of the Paris meeting – Ernest Bevin was the only one to accept, on behalf of the British government, while the Soviets and French sharply rebuked Byrnes' efforts – contrasted sharply with the progress the ACC was making towards an agreement on inter-zonal trade.

Like so many German issues in the late 1940s, the Bizone that resulted from the Anglo-American talks at the Paris CFM was a point of conflict for USMG and State Department officials. Within the USMG, there was an “expectation that, carefully handled, economic fusion could establish a framework for four-power amalgamation,” which was one of the reasons the occupation directors were willing to go along with a move that the State Department was presenting “as the first step in a deliberate strategy of dividing the country”.<sup>62</sup> It was notable in two respects: it was the first time that French obstructionism had been overcome in order to allow for the coordination of policies in two or more zones, and it marked a shift in occupier-occupied relations: although as part of the bizonal unification the Länder in the British zone were restructured to be more autonomous (as the American Länder were), the unification was opposed

---

61 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 186.

62 *Ibid.*, 233.

by German politicians, who saw the potential for and disapproved of the US State Department's plans for a divided Germany.<sup>63</sup> No matter how much the British and Americans emphasized that the goals of the Bizone were purely economic and administrative, the presence of the united zones was an unmistakable step away from four-power cooperation at a time when Germany – and Europe in general – could least afford such breakdowns.

### **B. The Formation of the Bizone as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate the turning point?* The progress made towards dividing Germany into two states by the development of the Bizone can be negated by either involving one or more of the other zones earlier or by dissolving the Bizone.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* Stalling the creation of the Bizone is undesirable as it allows more time for Byrnes to become more set in his desire for partial unification that did not involve the Soviets. Preventing the creation of the Bizone is as straightforward as finding ways to magnify existing differences between the U.S. and the U.K. so that Bevin would reject Byrnes' offer, either when it was made or at some point during talks to create the Bizone. This turning point can also be altered to produce either a trizone (US/UK/France or US/UK/USSR) or full unification.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* Byrnes had put forward the idea of unifying as much of Germany as possible and leaving the rest for later several times over the course of the occupation. As early as the Potsdam conference, which effectively created eastern and western economic spheres, there was an idea that the Western powers could combine their zones, however informally: if the Soviets were uncooperative at the ACC level, reparations

---

<sup>63</sup> Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 365. One notable exception to this disapproval was Konrad Adenauer, who was a vocal supporter of division from the end of the war on and would become the first Chancellor of West Germany after its formation.

negotiations would revert to the zone commanders, where the Americans, British, and French would “undoubtedly [find it] desirable to arrange tripartite programs”.<sup>64</sup> This approach also had support from the majority of the State Department, but Byrnes did not have the opportunity to present it to a receptive audience until the Paris CFM. Attempting to prevent that idea from being developed or presented at all is too implausible for our purposes, however, so rewrites will be focused on the conference and its immediate aftermath.

{4} *At what levels of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Rewrites are chiefly plausible at the personal level, as it was the foreign ministers who made the initial choices to commit or not commit their governments to the preliminary economic unification plan Byrnes offered.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* There is a minimum of four separate causal chains needed to produce any given set of responses to the Bizone proposal, one for each foreign minister. Some sets of alterations to these chains will fail to produce any appreciable change in the outcome, but that does not mean the event is overdetermined: it is sufficiently non-redundant that there is room to work with different combinations.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* The importance and likelihood of second-order counterfactuals vary widely depending on which of the alterations are made and, as such, will be set aside until the next section.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

#### *Alternate Narrative 1: No Zone Combination*

The British had several reasons that could have used as an excuse to not join with the Americans in creating the Bizone at the Paris CFM. The Ruhr and all its economic potential lay

---

<sup>64</sup> William Clayton, “The Assistant Secretary of State (Clayton) and the Director of the Office of Financial and Development Policy (Collado) to the Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Thorp), London, August 16, 1945,” *FRUS, Potsdam II*: 829.

solely within their occupation zone, and their more liberal attitude towards labor rights for German workers came into direct conflict with American attitudes towards the same. These conflicts could have resulted in the British turning down the fusion offer either when it was first proposed at the Paris CFM or later on during Anglo-American negotiations to create the Bizone, which were not finalized until late 1946 concurrent with the New York CFM meeting.

Failure to gain British support here would necessitate a re-working of all the United States' plans for a West German state. In their minds, the ideal West German state would encompass their own occupation zone, the French and British zones, and the Ruhr/Rhineland. The creation of a Bizone (or Trizone) was meant to be the first step towards that state. Economic unification would progress towards political unification at a Länder level in order to carry out new economic policies, and the new political structures would serve double duty as a basis for a West German state and as a symbol of intimidation against the Soviets.

At this point, there was still enough flexibility in the U.S. negotiating position that the idea of piecemeal unification may have been dropped altogether in the face of disapproval from both Britain and France. This would certainly be welcomed by General Clay and the USMG in Germany, who still had faith in the ACC as an institution of reform and unification. He would be able to present this American reversal to his fellow military governors as a show of good faith, and use the combined British-French disapproval at a ministerial level to marshal support behind his own plans for a better relationship with the Soviets and bring more determining power for Germany's fate into the hands of the ACC, which was more productive than the CFM.

Preventing the creation of the Bizone has the added benefit of removing the complications in coordination that the Bizonal institutions introduced. Up until the Bizone was

created, governing structures were mainly low-level, and overseen by the military governments with varying levels of autonomy given to the Germans. Although the Bizone started out as just an economic fusion, its growth into a political entity created yet another level of difficulty in planning out the governing structure of a united Germany, giving the occupying governments one more thing to fight over.

With the simplification of the forms of government and, crucially, the re-shifting of power back to the military government and the lack of a physical manifestation of Soviet exclusion, the lack of any progress towards the Bizone – and the improbability that it would be raised again without a noticeable change for the worse in the situation on the ground in Germany – this alternate narrative is one of the most promising for creating a unified Germany and preventing the Cold War. General Clay would have added freedom at a time when he was still invested in cooperation with the Soviets, and the Soviets would have an incentive to behave well lest the United States raise the possibility of bi- or tri-zonal fusion again and gain support.

*Alternate Narrative 2: Trizone (US/UK/France)*

It is highly unlikely, but possible that the French could have joined the British and the Americans in the zonal unification project, leading to an earlier formation of the Trizone that would become West Germany. This is the outcome that is most troubling for a future unified Germany. Early formation of the Trizone would make Soviet isolation more apparent earlier on, and would do more to deepen chasms between the Allies than mend them. It is also the most unlikely, given the PCF's influence in French politics and French worries about provoking the Soviets, and will not be considered further.

*Alternate Narrative 3: Trizone (US/UK/USSR)*

Byrnes' offer was geared towards the Western powers, and it intentionally came with conditions that he assumed the Soviets would find too distasteful to go along with. But in the interests of propriety, the offer had to encompass all the occupying powers, and had the Soviets accepted – a prospect not nearly as far out of the question as Byrnes would have liked – the Americans would then be faced with the problem of either turning them down (and thus losing an unacceptable amount of international credibility) or accepting the Soviets into the very organization they had hoped to use to *exclude* the Soviets from governance and policy formation in Germany.

There is enough flexibility in the American position here that this Trizone is not entirely out of the question, especially with the involvement of the British. In terms of zone management, the British Labour government actually had ideas and policies more similar to those of the Soviet Union (especially in areas of economic and labor concerns, such as trade unions) than to those of their allies the United States. As part of the Bizone formation, the British had to give up several key initiatives they had put forward in their zone, such as expanded rights for German laborers, in order to retain American support. With the introduction of the Soviet Union into these unification negotiations, however, the British gain an ally. While they would both still be dependent on the United States for the bulk of the financial contributions, they would be less likely to default to acceding to American requests. This, in turn, re-shapes the political map of occupied Germany, as the Americans would have a choice between working with the more leftist aims of the British and Soviets or of trying to push their own policy goals through regardless. The first option would raise security concerns for many at the State Department, but the second would force the Americans into the isolation that they had tried to move the Soviets into. This

would not necessarily be seen as a bad thing by some U.S. officials, but the overwhelming consensus in favor of a West Germany for Western Europe – one that, at this point, did not even have the support of all of Western Europe – had not yet developed.

An American/British/Soviet trizonal unification is, therefore, possible. And while it would be a fragile structure, and an incomplete one while the goal was still full unification, such a trizone would be a step *towards* unification, where the Bizone was a step *away* from unification. The more left-leaning ideas that would be given voice by the British-Soviet combination in the zone would make the idea of joining the Trizone more palatable to the French Socialists, who would prove difficult to convince to join the more conservative and anti-Soviet Anglo-American Bizone. This unified trizone – with or without the participation of the French – creates another forum in which the Americans and Soviets could work out the differences in their German policies, one in which the military leaders – at the time the ones most in favor of cooperation – would play the largest role, and comes with the British as a built-in mediation function. It creates the foundations necessary for a united Germany, and with those foundations another level of protection against the deterioration of American-Soviet relations.

#### *Alternate Narrative 4: Full Economic Unification*

The most attractive alternate outcome, as far as the Germans and the future of the Cold War were concerned, is full economic unification at the Paris CFM with both the Soviets and the French accepting Byrnes' plan with, perhaps, slight alterations. This narrative is, in some respects, a natural progression of the Trizone discussed in the previous section. France, as the weakest of the Western great powers after the war, possessed an occupation zone only due to the good graces of the Americans, British, and Soviets; much of their policy, therefore, while

informed by their fears of a resurgent Germany and worries over whether the Americans were being too soft on the Soviets, was also calculated to maintain and maximize their influence in Germany. The same Georges Bidault who would, in April 1947, assure Secretary of State George Marshall that the Americans had France's full support but that “France needed time and must avoid a civil war” needed to balance a desire to work with the Americans – who were the most influential in the Western zones – with the desires of his constituents and of the French Communist Party members who were part of the French governing coalition to work with the Soviets.<sup>65</sup> This was not the only reason Bidault rejected Byrnes in 1946 – there were plenty of disagreements over the proper treatment of the Ruhr/Rhineland and Saar areas that Bidault did not think were properly covered by the terms of Byrnes' proposal – but it is one that is both very important and fairly easy to remove for the purposes of this counterfactual.

Full economic unification at the Paris CFM under Byrnes' proposal requires that both the Soviets and the French change their negotiating positions. This could take several forms, but from the two scenarios explored above, it is more likely that the Soviets would agree first, followed by the French. In this version of history, the story of the Paris CFM is a story of unexpected triumph: with one simple proposal, and three ministers' agreement, Byrnes manages to undo what it had taken days of meetings and dozens of committee members to do at Potsdam and found a way to treat all of Germany as an economic whole.

Of course, the reality is that that proposal was anything but “simple”; although it facially encompassed economic issues only, properly handling those economic issues would involve the creation of new administrative agencies for the united zone and the formation of new intra-

---

<sup>65</sup> George Marshall, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, Moscow, April 20, 1947,” *FRUS* 1947 II: 369-370.

occupier connections. Creation of those agencies would amount to creation of central German agencies, a plan that the French had been blocking since the occupation began. And a direct transposition of the bizonal agreements that the United States and United Kingdom came to onto a quad-zone is not possible due to the addition of the French and the Soviets.

Had all three other powers present in Paris accepted Byrnes' offer, it would appear that not much had changed, at the beginning: agreement to form a quad-zone would, in effect, be just a re-affirmation of the four powers' previous statements on German economic integration. But it has two key features that mean it takes history in a much different direction from our world. First, it is a public quadripartite agreement on unification for *all four zones* of Germany. Considering the lengths the United States would later go to in our world to distance themselves from publicly supporting four-power efforts while still trying to tell the American public that they supported unification (when, in fact, they personally didn't), having this agreement on the record at the Paris conference would be a measure of accountability for the American politicians, both to their domestic audience and to their foreign counterparts. Second, it distances the economic and political issues, at least on paper. The entanglements between the two sorts of issues were easily exploitable, when one of the four powers wished to make a show of cooperating but did not want to achieve results, they would tie both palatable and unpalatable issues together to force deadlock or disagreement. With a Bizone-type plan for unification at the Paris conference, many of those issues would be separated for the purposes of future planning, forcing a level of honesty in debate and negotiation that was absent for much of the later occupation years or making those involved face even more serious challenges about their work in Germany back home.

It is difficult to immediately predict the alignment of this unified Germany – much would depend on the course the negotiations took, and whether the more socialist-oriented policies of the Soviets and the British (and, to an extent, the French, though those were not Bidault's personal views) could influence the Americans' more conservative economic tendencies to any appreciable degree. But Germany would be united, first economically and then – by necessity – politically. And in the course of developing a unified Germany out of Byrnes' Paris proposal, the level and tone of the debates over Germany would be sufficiently altered to prevent Germany from becoming an issues over which U.S.-Soviet relations devolved into Cold War.

#### **IV. TURNING POINT 3: THE LONDON COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING**

##### **A. The London CFM in Our World**

American plans for a separate West German state finally got their chance to gain international approval at the 1947 meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London. Unlike previous CFM meetings, which had contained at least the potential for some sort of agreement, the London 1947 one saw few pretensions towards good faith negotiating on the part of either the Americans or the British. During the planning stage of the conference, “with rumors afloat of possible Soviet concessions, the British asked if there were any terms under which the United States would accept Germany's economic unification. The State Department's John Hickerson responded negatively”.<sup>66</sup> Although worried the Soviets would offer concessions that the Western Powers couldn't reject without blatantly contradicting their public commitment to unity, the American delegation came to the conference planning to split Germany: “together with the British, their operational goal was to conduct the meeting so that the Soviets would appear

<sup>66</sup> Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 353.

responsible for the results. Once the Allied negotiations had failed, they intended to proceed with the arrangements for a West German government".<sup>67</sup>

The Americans got their wish. They began the final session of the meeting with new linkages: the unified Germany must be allowed to receive Marshall Plan aid if it desired, there must be a total ban on reparations from current production, the unified German government would be based on the Länder system, and political rights would be heavily regulated. But Molotov made numerous concessions over the course of the meeting, including explicitly removing Soviet reparations as a precondition for the economic unity of Germany in a December 8 statement. By December 10, Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith was becoming concerned about Molotov's concessions, writing to General Eisenhower that "the difficulty under which we labor is that in spite of our announced position, we really do not want nor intend to accept German unification in any terms that the Russians might agree to," no matter how reasonable those terms sounded.<sup>68</sup> Marshall was also worried, not only that he would have a difficult time justifying his actions to the public if those concessions continued.<sup>69</sup> By December 12, however, Marshall had found Molotov's breaking point, and the Soviet minister denounced the American position and accused them of failing to fulfill their wartime promises. On December 15, Bevin, Bidault, and Marshall agreed that the CFM meeting needed to be over.

The main obstacle to German unity at the London CFM was, then, the United States. While Molotov's rhetoric in the early council session was harsh, the Soviet negotiating position was far more flexible than it would later be portrayed in the Western press and demonstrated a sensitivity to actual conditions and opinions in Germany that was lacking in the Western position

---

67 Ibid., 355.

68 Walter Bedell Smith, "Smith to Eisenhower, 10 December 1947," in Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 359.

69 George Marshall, "The Secretary of State to the Acting Secretary of State, London, December 11, 1947," *FRUS* 1947 II: 764-66.

(which was more concerned with the effect Soviet concessions would have on Marshall Plan aid and a restoration of capitalist Western Europe). The image of Molotov sitting in the Council's meeting room at the end of the December 15<sup>th</sup> session, being denounced by one after another of his colleagues for a split that he and his government neither wanted nor caused, is perhaps one of the most tragic to come out of the German negotiations in 1945-1948: a stark illustration of the Soviets' isolation, a graphic image of how subverted German national interest had become subverted to great power politicking, and a haunting reminder of what could have been had the British and Americans been willing to negotiate.

### **B. The London CFM as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate the turning point?* The no truly simple way to negate the effects of the London CFM meeting. After the progress made toward getting Western European powers to accept American plans for a separate West German state at the meeting, it would take a crisis (on the level of the Berlin blockade) to create the conditions necessary for a re-evaluation of German policy.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* As a regularly scheduled Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, this conference is virtually impossible to prevent or stall. Altering the character and outcome of the meeting, however, is relatively simple. The Soviet negotiating position was flexible, as seen above, and though the British and Americans (and, to some extent, the French) were much less willing to maneuver, they were also very much beholden to public opinion. Had Molotov been willing to go just a little further in his concessions (or made them earlier in the conference), or had the Western powers been just a little bit more worried about the opinions of their constituents

domestically, a rational meeting point may have been found.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* The policies and conditions for unification put forward at the London CFM were a crystallization of two years of debate in Washington, London, Paris, and Moscow, so it is possible, though not desirable, to start rewrites at virtually any point in 1946 or 1947. However, as the meeting was important more for its outcome than its existence, it is better to start rewrites during the meeting itself.

{4} *At what levels of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Rewrites are plausible on the personal level, specifically, those of the conference attendees. It is in this scenario that Bevin and Bidault, who have so far taken a backseat to their American and Soviet counterparts, take on a larger role as intermediaries between Marshall and Molotov. Bidault was facing serious political trouble back home in France, and Bevin was more easily swayed by Molotov's concessions than Marshall.<sup>70</sup>

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* This is a question relevant mostly when trying to prevent the occurrence of a turning point, which is not the goal of this section.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* The danger of altering the outcome of the London CFM is that that changes policy, not necessarily reality. The time between the final London communiqué and actual unification would be tense, and long enough for disagreements to resurface and render the London decisions moot. However, that would also require a very public policy reversal on the part of one or more of the powers, and although the American political milieu was sufficiently anti-communist and anti-Soviet that they may have been willing to risk it if they felt that the long-term effects of policies agreed to in London would be too damaging, it is doubtful they would be able to bring the British and French in line with them, and

---

70 Marshall, "London, December 11, 1947," 765-766.; Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 360.

the limited opportunities for unilateral action on Germany would prevent a slide back to division.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

The Americans came to London fully expecting immediate and game-changing concessions from the Soviets. When these did not appear within the first few days of the conference, they became complacent; when Molotov did start to make concessions all he managed to create was several days of worry for the Americans rather than any serious re-evaluation of their plans. Had he made his concessions earlier, he would have managed to force the Americans' hand in way that he did not accomplish by making concessions so late in the conference. Although the Americans did not plan to accept reunification at all, much less on Soviet conditions, and had come up with tactics to avoid and twist any offers made by Molotov, early concessions would have at least meant that they would have had to lay their conditions out immediately, thus launching more discussion both at the conference and in the home countries of each of the negotiators, as well as in Germany.

Domestic public opinion was a major factor at the London conference, as it was consistently throughout all negotiations on Germany. Had concessions been announced immediately, the Western powers would have been under much more pressure to try to meet Molotov at least partway along. And if they had responded to that pressure, what sort of Germany might we expect to see come out of the London conference?

At London, Molotov was at his most conciliatory, and the Western powers at their most belligerent, with the ability to follow through on their threats of disruption. Plans for the future of Germany, therefore, would likely include most of what the Western powers wanted. And with Bidault and Bevin both curious in search of ways to deal with Molotov – and equally wary of an

American-controlled Germany, a Soviet-controlled Germany, and a strong independent Germany – they were well placed to moderate American demands and produce plans for a western-leaning but independent and demilitarized Germany. And with those plans in hand, and real progress being made on substantial issues, the triggers for many of the worst crises that were yet to come would be removed, leaving the quadripartite relationships if not on perfect terms, at least not on Cold War terms.

## **V. TURNING POINT 4: THE BERLIN CRISIS**

### **A. The Berlin Crisis in Our World**

Soviet retaliation against Western plans to form a separate West German state came, as had been speculated, in Berlin. The capital city, 100 miles inside the Soviet occupation zone, was one of the few areas where the Western powers were vulnerable. Relations between the occupying powers predictably deteriorated after the London Three-Power conference, and the end of 1947 marked the first “official increase in the tightness of the zonal frontiers on the part of the Russians” since the beginning of the occupation.<sup>71</sup> But the dividing line between East and West that ran through the center of Germany was not the focus of the Soviet response, rather, the Soviets turned, appropriately, to Berlin. The Soviet government was well aware that anything that happened in the free city would affect the rest of the country – and the rest of Europe – as well. The blockade was not only a physical manifestation of Soviet concerns about what Western plans for a West German state would do to the political and economic geography of Europe but a signal of a shift in Soviet policy: relations between the occupying powers in Berlin had historically been better than relations between the occupying powers at higher, political levels.

---

<sup>71</sup> Nettl, *The Eastern Zone*, 262.

The decision to block off Western access to Berlin was a gamble for the future of Germany and Europe both. Unfortunately for the Soviets, they had miscalculated: General Clay, their former ally on German unification policy, had been drifting further away from the Soviet position for some time, and by the start of the blockade, he was ready to use military force to break it.<sup>72</sup>

The blockade's immediate cause was a currency reform bill that had been in the planning stages since 1946, and that the Americans hoped to get a quadripartite agreement on in order to signal to the Soviets that despite their halting of Western reparations (a move opposed by Bevin) and the outcome of the London conference, there was still hope for four-power cooperation in vulnerable Berlin.<sup>73</sup> Those good intentions, however, were mitigated by the fact that the currency reform bill put forward in early 1948 eliminated virtually every element that the Soviets had found agreeable: they “had just made a big compromise on [a second printing site in] Leipzig and [were] prepared to be flexible on the finance department and central bank. Sokolovsky pointed out that if there 'was a real desire to do so, we could coordinate US and USSR proposals without difficulty’”.<sup>74</sup> But in this particular contest between the U.S.'s concern for adhering to their public commitment to German unity and plans for a divided Germany, the London Accords won out, and the Soviet sector was dropped from the currency reform. This choice was helped by the 300-286 vote in support of the London Accords that Bidault had managed to wrangle from the French National Assembly, despite the fierce opposition of French socialists who wanted either rapprochement with the Soviets or guarantees added to the London Accords that made it clear that the ultimate goal was neither Soviet exclusion nor a divided Germany.<sup>75</sup> With French

---

72 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 413.

73 Ibid., 379-380.

74 Ibid., 381.

75 Ibid., 402-403. For more detail on the French concerns and the domestic dissent Bidault faced in trying to reconcile the French and Anglo-American positions on West Germany, see, for example, Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* and Michael Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally*:

support secured, the United States was more confident than before in pushing for a West German state, spurning two offers of negotiation from the Soviets (a response to a speech by Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith and a note sent from Stalin to former vice president Henry Wallace) as empty propaganda offensive. The currency reform went forward, and the Soviets closed off Berlin.

The Soviet conditions for ending the blockade of Berlin were straightforward: they wanted, at a minimum, a rejection by Western powers of any intention to divide Germany. Other conditions – reparations, currency issues, and procedures for quadripartite governance – were either subordinated to a unified Germany or necessary for its creation. Responses from the West were mixed. Most in the United States policy circles hoped that they could simply wait the Soviets out, until the blockade collapsed under its own weight and brought the Soviets' credibility down with it. Others, such as George Kennan, thought that there was a way to hold constructive talks with the Soviets and that the loss of an independent West Germany was an acceptable sacrifice to ensure the survival of West Berlin. The French, already the most tentative members of the trizonal partnership, and the British were rattled by the blockade, and when the Americans demonstrated their unwillingness to cooperate with the Soviets – or even hold discussions with them in good faith – they started to doubt the intentions of the United States in Germany at all. By the time the United States presented the Berlin question to the United Nations, the British and French were tilting towards the compromise plans being worked out, regarding, for example, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett's instructions to not be drawn into compromises over a split government in Berlin as “a break of previous understandings and

an unacceptable demonstration of bad faith”.<sup>76</sup>

The Berlin blockade did not arise from a void. The Americans knew Soviet retaliation was likely, and they knew it was likely in Berlin, and yet they purposefully avoided several peaceful overtures from the Soviets in the spring of 1948 that could have prevented the blockade and put the great powers back on track to form some kind of unified Germany. In May, Molotov used the statements of Ambassador Smith, which were overall a condemnation of the Soviet Union but ended by leaving the door “wide open for full discussion and the composing of our differences,” to propose a new round of negotiation: though Smith's statements were not truly meant as anything other than a diplomatic nicety, the Soviets then embarrassed the State Department by taking them literally.<sup>77</sup> Molotov followed his proposal by releasing to the Soviet press messages between himself and Smith that seemed to highlight the men's areas of agreement in an effort to press forward with negotiations, compounding Washington's frustration. Soon after, Stalin sent former vice president Henry Wallace, who had issued his own call for negotiations and “sharply criticized both sides and offered a set of proposals – including the unification of Germany – to reduce conflict,” a note praising his attempts at conflict resolution.

There is nothing to suggest that the Soviets' offers weren't genuine: they were well in line with previous Soviet offers, and the Soviets themselves were operating from a place of relative weakness. Had the Americans taken them up on their offer, the Soviets would have come to the table. But the Americans were less interested in accepting such offers than their constituents – and their allies in Western Europe – would have liked. They were facing “support for a military buildup and for the German partition [that] was tenuous at best. If citizens in Europe of [sic]

---

<sup>76</sup> Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 467.

<sup>77</sup> Walter Bedell Smith, “Statements of Ambassador Smith and Foreign Minister Molotov, March 4, 1948,” in Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 404.

America perceived a safe alternative, they might be tempted to explore it".<sup>78</sup> And though those citizens didn't find many sympathetic ears in American policy circles, they had better luck with the French military government: after first advocating for direct talks with the Soviets and being rejected by the Americans, they moved to revive the quadripartite ACC in Berlin, and "regardless of the outcome, 'the solid front' had been broken, offering another manifestation of the 'French desire to appease [the] USSR to the fullest extent possible".<sup>79</sup> These fractures in the Western front, which continued to spread throughout the debates over how to react to and solve (or not solve) the problem of the Berlin crisis make it possible to explore alternate ends to the blockade.

The blockade made obvious what had been underlying all discussions on Germany for the past two years: "a divided Germany was not simply a symbol but also a stimulus to East-West confrontation".<sup>80</sup> In taking their case to the United Nations, the U.S. hoped to move away from quadripartite talks over resolving the blockade that were taking place in Moscow, and use their influence in the UN to issue a condemnation of the Soviets. The real outcome, however, was a concentrated and coordinated effort by everyone from the secretary-general to the representatives of the neutral countries on the Security Council (Nationalist China, Argentina, Colombia, Belgium, Syria, and Canada) to economic experts who saw legitimate grievances on the part of all the powers to find a solution. Compromise, therefore, was a possibility for all parties involved except the United States. And when those compromises fell apart under the power of the Americans' veto, their debris left behind a virtually powerless UN that was starting to solidify into East-West blocks over all issues, not just the German question.

---

78 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 406.

79 Ibid., 407.

80 Ibid., 460.

## **B. The Berlin Crisis as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate the turning point?* We can negate the effects of the blockade by either preventing it entirely, or by ending it earlier and bringing about an outcome that was not equivalent to total defeat for the Soviets.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* There are multiple rewrites that could prevent the blockade entirely, mostly involving altering the way in which the USMG implemented the political decisions from the London conferences. Altering the outcome of the blockade by giving a louder voice to either the UN or the pro-unification forces in the U.S. government also offer opportunities for rewrites.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* The proximate cause of the blockade was the currency reform that the Western powers undertook in the spring of 1948, which not only set the Western zones apart from the Soviet zone, but was one of the first actions by the USMG (rather than an action taken at a political level) that was explicitly anti-Soviet. The blockade was also a Soviet reaction to Western plans for dividing Germany, and although “it was [...] frequently held that the Berlin blockade was an attempt to [...] ensure that Soviet political and economic measures could be carried out in relative secrecy” the reactionary nature of the blockade cannot be denied.<sup>81</sup> Rewrites could start as early as the London Three-Power conference, but the currency reform and Soviet overtures during the spring of 1948 are better launching points for more focused counterfactuals.

{4} *At what levels of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Rewrites of the Berlin Crises are, as expected, plausible on personal levels: Kennan, Marshall, Clay, Stalin, Sokolovsky, and Molotov were all deeply personally involved in negotiations over ending the blockade. But rewrites here

---

81 Nettle, *The Eastern Zone*, 108.

are also plausible at an institutional level as well. For the first time during the occupation of Germany, the United States took its case to the United Nations (the Soviets had tried earlier, but had been prevented from doing so by the United States).<sup>82</sup> Although the U.S. did not have any intention of following through with any recommendations it received from the UN, especially when it could not be certain those recommendations would be fully supportive of its position, it involved the UN as a show of good faith, and was promptly surprised when the UN took its task as a peacemaker seriously.<sup>83</sup> The UN's actions, though ultimately fruitless, were both an important feature of the Berlin blockade and the clearest sign possible that disputes over Germany had moved far beyond disagreements over great power occupation policy and into the realm of issues that would seriously impact the international order.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* The Berlin Blockade was one of several potential anticipated Soviet responses to the London Six Power conferences that planned the foundations of the West German state, but it also relied on the currency reform in order to provide an immediate justification for action. Once put in place, the continuation of the blockade depended on the day-to-day outcome of talks between the Soviets and the Western powers.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* Were Germany to be unified as part of negotiations to end the Berlin crisis, there is no easy way to re-divide the country. The Soviet conditions for unification were both meticulously detailed and flexible, characteristics shared by Kennan's pro-unification response for the Americans. Regardless of American goals for a separate West German state (which were really just a second-best alternative to goals for a united and integrated with Western Europe German state), the emergence of a unified Germany from

---

82 Martin Hart-Landsberg, *Korea: Division, Reunification, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 104.

83 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 461.

this crisis would be a diplomatic victory that would reshape the future of U.S.-Soviet relations and prevent (or at least offer a model solution to) any further downward spirals of those relations.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

#### *Alternate Narrative 1: Kennan's Plan*

The most pro-cooperation plan came, surprisingly enough, from George Kennan. Over the years his stance towards the Soviets had mellowed somewhat, and that change was reflected in his “A Program For Germany” policy paper, known as “Plan A”. In this, he reversed his earlier advocacy of containment as the best way of restricting Soviet power and suggested that the United States could “no longer retain the present line of division in Europe, and yet hope to keep things flexible for an eventual retraction of Soviet power” from Europe.<sup>84</sup> Rather, in order to prevent the solidification and militarization of the division of Europe, the U.S. should act in Germany, where the “lines of cleavage [had] not yet hardened completely” and unify Germany.<sup>85</sup> With the Berlin blockade well underway at the time of his writing in August of 1948, he found a chilly reception from the State Department, which was not even sure it wanted a solution to the blockade while it was providing such good anti-Soviet propaganda material. Kennan was persistent, however, and was allowed to keep working on the policy papers. After conversations between Jessup and Maisky made it clear that the United States needed to present to the international community some sort of conciliatory plan, Kennan's Plan A resurfaced. But, as Kennan himself later recounted “someone, somewhere (I was told, from the military side), deliberately, on the eve of the Paris foreign ministers' meeting, leaked to James Reston (who promptly made a front-page *New York Times* story out of it) a highly distorted version of what

---

84 George Kennan, “Policy Questions Concerning a Possible German Settlement,” *FRUS* 1948 II:1287-97.

85 *Ibid.*

the plan was meant to be”.<sup>86</sup> The plan was disavowed by the American government, and Kennan recalls that “the remainder of the State Department, incidentally, showed nothing but satisfaction over this turn of events; and I have yet to hear that the leak of this highly classified document – a glaring breach of official security – was ever protested or investigated in any quarter”.<sup>87</sup>

It has become common wisdom, in the following years, that the Russians would never have agreed to the terms of Plan A, especially the disarmed and neutralized Germany that it provided for. But how realistic is that? The Soviets had no real objection in principle to neutral countries during the Cold War and even before, as demonstrated by their stance on Austria – if a policy denied the United States a military and economic ally that could be used against the Soviet Union, the policy deserved consideration at the least. Kennan, too, thought that the Soviets would “have paid a higher price than most people think to get the American forces out of the great part of Germany”.<sup>88</sup> Progress along the lines of Plan A would undoubtedly have been an uphill battle, against the State Department and military government biases and against Konrad Adenauer, one of the few pro-division German voices in Germany but also one of the most powerful voices overall. But, barring the leak, it would have been possible. And once progress began, eventually even Plan A's biggest American detractors would be forced to admit that it had more to gain from the first step of Plan A – Berlin's ensured safety and the end of the blockade – than from the propaganda battle with the Soviets that the blockade was becoming. The Germany that emerged from Plan A would have its own difficulties. But it would not be a physical symbol of division in Europe, and it would not be the rope in a game of tug-of-war between the Americans and the Soviets, both qualities that would have many more long-term benefits for the

---

86 Kennan, “A Letter on Germany,” *The New York Review of Books* 45 (December 1998):20.

87 *Ibid.*, 21.

88 *Ibid.*

country than the immediate economic boost it could get from ending the blockade on wholly American terms.

*Alternate Narrative 2: The UN/Bramuglia Plan*

The United Nations, when given the problem of Berlin by the United States, managed to do something virtually unprecedented in the history of post-war German policy formation: they shocked the bearers of their volatile gift by trying to solve the problem. Under the leadership of Security Council president Juan Bramuglia, the UN put together a plan to bring the feuding great powers together and reach compromises on not only access rights to Berlin, but the currency reform and other outstanding issues as well. Although both the British and the French were at times willing to work with the UN, the American veto prevented the proposals from going anywhere. Bramuglia did succeed in getting the four powers to meet, and remained involved in discussions, but independent role in conflict resolutions for the United Nations was one of the biggest casualties of the Berlin Blockade: the United States, “in evading proposals for compromise, [...] weakened the organization's peace-making function, while keeping intact their plans for a separate West German state”.<sup>89</sup> The success of the United Nations' proposal in this alternate version of history, then, does not only bring about a peaceful end to the immediate crisis in Berlin but preserves its ability to be a more functional, credible, and involved organization. It establishes a pattern of great power reconciliation via international and moderated discussions. Not only does the UN then have the credibility and experience to remain involved in moderation of the rest of the German questions, when issues such as the Korean War threatened to bring the Americans and the Soviets the UN would be able to step in and prevent the American-Soviet ideological conflicts from escalating into global conflicts.

---

<sup>89</sup> Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 460.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The Germany that emerged from World War II existed as a “unified” entity for only four years (during which time it was used as a political and economic tool by policymakers in the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union) before being divided into one Western-aligned country and one Soviet-aligned one, largely due to the desires of U.S. State Department officials. But such an outcome was opposed by most Germans, many members of the American military government in Germany, and almost everyone involved in shaping foreign policy for the Soviet Union. As superpower politicians brought Germany closer to division, Germany became a symbol of the worsening relations between East and West, and those poor relations circled back to negatively impact diplomatic negotiations over Germany. A united Germany, regardless of its alignment, would have altered and plausibly improved U.S.-Soviet relations and prevented the Cold War.

This belief is not universal. James McAllister argues that despite any possible “missed opportunities” to preserve a united Germany, “the idea that Stalin would have ultimately accepted a parliamentary, democratic regime for Germany in the Western sense of the term, even if he could have been satisfied on the reparations question, is not compelling,” pointing to Soviet interference in East German politics as proof.<sup>90</sup> What McAllister overlooks, however, is the general Soviet attitude toward non-aligned countries during the early days of the Cold War: namely, neutral countries, no matter what their political system was, were a *benefit* to the Soviet Union because they denied the United States an ally, as we saw with Austria. And because Germany did not directly border the Soviet Union, Stalin did not have as personal of an

---

<sup>90</sup> McAllister, *No Exit*, 118.

investment in controlling German politics as he did in North Korea or Poland.

Carolyn Eisenberg concludes her study of the American decision to divide Germany by musing that “had American officials been more flexible and sought a compromise solution in occupied Germany, it is possible that the Soviets would have blocked or overturned it. But that is something we cannot know since the United States selected a different course”.<sup>91</sup> Such alternate courses, however, are not as unknowable as Eisenberg suggests. Plausible alternate worlds encompassing the “what if”s of Germany's division can be constructed from the documents we have: worlds in which American officials were more accepting of Soviet offers to compromise and where the Soviets held to their word. An overall evaluation of concessions the Soviets were willing to make to preserve German unity – even at times when preserving such unity would mean that Germany would be Western-aligned – demonstrates that preventing democratic processes from taking hold in Germany was not Stalin's first priority in that country. And a unified Germany need not have been Western-aligned to prevent the Cold War: as long as Germany could be seen as a balancing point – as opposed to a conflict point – between the U.S. and the USSR, conflicts between the two superpowers would not take the form of the Cold War.

---

91 Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 493.

## CHAPTER 3: KOREA

### I. INTRODUCTION

Quite in contrast to the Allied occupation of Germany, the American and Soviet occupations of Korea were virtually accidental. The abrupt ending of the war against Japan necessitated quick arrangements for the acceptance of the Japanese surrender in Korea. Prior to the end of the war, the Great Powers had agreed to very little regarding the changes in Korea's colonial status the war would cause, largely because, with the exception of the Cairo declaration that Korea would become independent "in due course" and a brief discussion of an American-Soviet-British-Chinese Four Power trusteeship, Korea was simply not an important consideration at the wartime conferences.

The Soviet security aims in Korea were virtually identical to those they pursued in Eastern Europe: a state still trying to absorb the shocking loss of over 20 million people, they wanted an "assurance that the Korean peninsula would not provide venue for an attack against Russia".<sup>92</sup> Such an aim was not entirely incompatible with the aims of the United States, as Soviet advisers were probably well aware, and it necessitated neither the initial division of Korea into two occupation zones nor the development of communism in North Korea. The Soviet Union pursued the same aims in Austria and Manchuria, clearly demonstrating the existence of alternatives to the situation that developed on the peninsula. In short, "Soviet goals in [...] Korea were defensive and minimalist, not designed for territorial aggrandizement or expansion".<sup>93</sup> They were economic rather than political – railroad and port rights in Manchuria – and strategically defensive – a reasonably Soviet-friendly Korean government that would be prevented from

<sup>92</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1946-1947*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 121.

<sup>93</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 40.

falling under Japanese control, not necessarily a Communist one.

The United States did not have much strategic interest in Korea until close to the end of the war, and when such an interest did develop, it revolved almost entirely around the Soviet Union. Franklin Roosevelt had hopes to “incorporate the Soviet Union into an Anglo-American partnership, acknowledge its interests, and give it responsibilities for maintaining the peace”<sup>94</sup>: in essence, this was an early and less vindictive version of the containment doctrine that involved giving the Soviets their own toys and telling them to go play in the corner and not cause trouble for the polite non-communists of the world; a version of containment that would have been far more effective at forming a true peace. But even this sort of cautious optimism – that the Soviets could in any way be persuaded to cooperate peaceably in building the post-war order – failed to gain any traction outside of Roosevelt’s own plans and those of his inner circle. Fear of Soviet double-crossing was obvious in nearly every other government office: “from late 1943 on, State Department planners began to worry about a Korea in Soviet hands; and from early 1944 on, they began to plan for a partial or full military occupation of Korea”.<sup>95</sup> This new-found American concern for Korean affairs represented a sharp departure from traditional American security policies in Asia, and was based entirely on the then-unstated assumption that the Soviet Union was going to be the next enemy, and a Soviet Union in possession of Korea was to be prevented.

Original plans for the American military in Korea envisioned a joint U.S.-Soviet military administration, with the leading role going, naturally, to the United States. The first mention of a definitive division of Korea with respect to occupation zones is in a 1945 War Department draft plan “providing for the acceptance of the surrender of the Japanese forces north of the 38th

---

94 Cumings, *Origins*, 113.

95 Ibid.

parallel by the Russians and south of that like by American forces”.<sup>96</sup> This division of responsibilities, Leland Goodrich suggests, was a “second best” situation for the U.S., considered as a possibility due to the overwhelming Soviet presence so close to the Korean border. He identifies four specific political goals motivating the proposal:

(1) to prevent the occupation of all of Korea by Soviet forces, which was considered unavoidable in the absence of such an arrangement; (2) to place the United States in as strong a position as possible to implement the promise of Korean independence; (3) to provide for the security of Japan and of United States forces during the period of military occupation of Japan; and (4) to limit the area of Communist control.<sup>97</sup>

This division, therefore, was motivated in large part by explicitly anti-Communist and anti-Soviet politics and, like most military decisions made with mostly (or solely) political goals in mind, soon caused serious logistical trouble for the United States. This was exacerbated by Soviet actions that directly contravened pre-existing American threat perceptions, and in hindsight the continued American insistence on this division is curious: Stalin, though in a *position* to occupy all of Korea, showed no real inclinations at the time that he *actually* wanted to occupy all of Korea. Of the several changes he requested to the War Department plan, none of them had to do with the division line, and after the fighting ended, he quickly pulled his troops in the south back above the 38th parallel. As was characteristic of U.S.-Soviet encounters at this time, the gap between perceptions and actions had American policymakers looking for hidden Soviet motives instead of looking towards recalibrating their perceptions.

Further evidence of the anti-Soviet nature of the American operations in Korea immediately after the war can be found in the summary dismissal of the People’s Republic of

---

96 Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956), 12.

97 *Ibid.*, 13-14

Korea. As the closest thing approaching organized government in immediately post-colonial Korea and the de facto authorities, recognition of and cooperation with its leaders would have been a logical first step towards ensuring Korean independence. Unfortunately, the United States Military Command “appears to have assumed that the Koreans were incapable of governing themselves, and furthermore to have viewed the People’s Republic as being a front for Communist activity”.<sup>98</sup> While it is true that the KPR was mostly comprised of leftists, socialists, and communists – the groups that had the most pre-existing organization due to their anti-Japanese activities – its existence clearly demonstrates that the United States did have options for interacting with the Koreans other than the small, conservative Korean Democratic Party (KDP), which was comprised mostly of Japanese collaborators. Their desire to work with the KDP had less to do with finding the most representative or organized political group and much more to do with finding a group that would absolutely reject the Soviets. This tilt towards the KDP was magnified when recognition of the KPR was immediately granted by the Soviet authorities in the North, who utilized those government structures in their rebuilding and governing processes. This combination of Korean government under Soviet military auspices and the American military government (assisted by Japanese officials and former collaborators) exacerbated zonal issues, impeded communication, and constituted one of the biggest barriers to quick independence for all of Korea. Had both occupying powers been willing to recognize and work with the Korean government – weak and decentralized as the KPR government was – nearly all of the most contentious issues between the US and Soviet commands (which Koreans should participate in which discussions and when, the timing and extent of troop withdrawals, and so on) would have been rendered moot.

---

98 Goodrich, *U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, 15.

The deep disconnect between actual Soviet aims in Korea and American perception of Soviet aims makes it highly unlikely that either side would have allowed the other to occupy the whole of the peninsula after the defeat of the Japanese. But that disconnect and the resulting initial division did not have to prove fatal for Korea and American-Soviet relations. While much can be and has been said about the conditions that led to the division of Korea into occupation zones, the more interesting question when considering American-Soviet relations and the role of Korea in the Cold War is, what factors made this division permanent? Why did the 38th parallel, “initially conceived for a limited tactical purpose [... become] an important frontier in the ‘cold war’ with each party basically intent on keeping the other from bringing all of Korea into its zone of influence”<sup>99</sup> Deteriorating relationships between the US and Soviet governments led to a corresponding deterioration in the relationships between the military commands in Korea (and their Korean proxies) and vice versa in a vicious circle, but where were the opportunities for American, Soviet, and Korean personnel, both on the ground on the peninsula and in Washington and Moscow, to break out of that circle?

Some of the answers to those questions can be found in the actions of the Koreans, who are often overlooked in the discussions of their own fates. They were far from content to sit idly by while occupying authorities discussed and decided the fate of their nation, and their clashes or cooperation with the occupying authorities pushed those powers to take the actions that would ultimately lead to Korea's division. Opportunities for action were far more prevalent in the north, where the Soviets had declined to set up anything resembling a military government; while they had their Korean favorites like the Americans did, those favorites were individuals rather than parties and they were given a much freer hand to make their own policies instead of

---

<sup>99</sup> Goodrich, *U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, 15.

implementing those of a military government. And processes of state-building and national identity-construction, especially for a people just emerging from decades of colonization, are difficult to stop or reverse, even more so in the Korean case where they were truly mass-supported (as opposed to in the South, where they were mostly dictated by a handful of upper-class conservatives handpicked by the U.S. to receive their support).<sup>100</sup> In fact, Bruce Cumings argues that the two Koreas that still exist had taken form by the end of 1946.<sup>101</sup> So in order to identify turning points leading up to the solidification of this division and the role it would play in the global superpower conflict, we must look further back: to the formation of the Korean People's Republic, and to the role the United Nations – an external non-state actor – played in the formation of both North and South Korea. Equally important, however, is the one event that could have reunited the two Koreas in time to alter the nature of the Cold War: the Korean War, from its beginning in 1950 to its never-predetermined end in early 1953.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an in-depth examination of four major turning points in the history of the Korean occupation and division: the failure of the United States military occupation to recognize the Korean People's Republic, the failure to properly implement the terms of the Moscow Agreement, the decision of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea to hold elections in the south of Korea (a decision with no equivalent in

---

100 Anthony D. Smith points out that in the modern world nations and states are most obviously recognized as single entities – nation-states which have “frontiers, capitals, flags, anthems, passports, currencies, military parades, national museums, embassies, and usually a seat at the United Nations” - nations and states are rarely 100% coextensive, and the two form through very different processes. The Korean nation existed well before the arrival of the occupying troops and was instrumental in the fight against Japanese colonialism; the Americans and Soviets built different state structures atop that nation. The ways in which nation and state became intertwined to the extent that North and South Korea each consider themselves the “real” Korean nation-state are beyond the scope of this paper, but their presence is important to keep in mind when considering how the two Koreas developed under the hands of their post-war occupiers. See Anthony D. Smith, *State-Making and Nation Building*,” in John A. Hall, ed., *States in History*, (Chichester: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 228-263.

101 Cumings, *Origins*, 428.

the German case and thus a good way to contrast the Korean and German cases), and the Korean War.

## II. TURNING POINT 1: THE KOREAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

### A. The History of the KPR

When the Americans and the Soviets arrived in Korea they found, somewhat to their surprise, that not only was the situation nowhere near as dire as the Japanese had implied, but there was already the beginnings of a peninsula-wide government in the form of the Korean People's Republic. While most matters were being handled on regional levels by People's Committees, the foundation was laid for a Seoul-based central government. The KPR enjoyed widespread support across the entire peninsula, and though understandably left-leaning was also representative of a wide cross-section of Koreans and of differing political opinions. In the north, moderate nationalists such as Cho Man-sik joined the KPR to assist in governing: his "committee immediately recognized the Korean People's Republic and placed itself under its authority after September 6," 1945.<sup>102</sup> The KPR's hold was weakest in the conservative south and in the urban centers, especially because it lost more rightist members after they realized that the Soviet Union would not, in fact, be occupying the entirety of the peninsula. At the time, however, the KPR was the largest political group, the only one that had a presence throughout the entire country and the only one to have a clear policy statement other than the individual members' self-interests. But what should have been a benefit to the Koreans – having a native government to take over from the colonial Japanese – soon became a serious problem when that government began to clash with the occupation commanders: "the existence of the People's Republic, with its allied people's

---

<sup>102</sup> Cumings, *Origins*, 392.

committees, labor unions, and peasant organizations throughout the peninsula, deeply politicized the Occupation and became the touchstone against which all policies and decisions were evaluated.”<sup>103</sup>

Rather than deal with the KPR, the Americans went in search of other ways to set up their government in the south. Their first attempt, using Japanese bureaucrats and Korean collaborators from the colonial period, was a complete failure, and the Japanese officials were soon replaced by American-picked conservative Koreans. The KPR continued to operate in the south, but by necessity drifted further away from its northern branches and withered under the cold American response. Cumings argues that “by mid-October [1945] it had become apparent that the KPR had no future under the American occupation,” though it would take two more months for the KPR to be outlawed, and several more months and vicious fights with American officials after that for the KPR to fall completely.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the fact that the KPR was doing more actual governing for the Korean people through the People's Committees than the Military Government was doing through its bureaucracy, Occupation Commander General Hodge demanded that the KPR drop 'republic' from its title and organize only as a political party; notably, they did not demand the same from the KDP or Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku's Korean Provisional Government (KPG) operating out of Nationalist China, both of which styled themselves as governmental alternatives to the KPR. People's committee representatives met in November 1945 to formulate a response, and ended up “refus[ing] to give in to Hodge's demands, although they expressed their support for the Occupation and recognized its authority south of the thirty-eighth parallel”.<sup>105</sup> This, however, was

---

103 Cumings, *Origins*, 135.

104 *Ibid.*, 149.

105 *Ibid.*, 196.

not enough for Hodge and the leaders of the Occupation, despite repeated assurances from the KPR that they “would cooperate with and support the M[ilitary] G[overnment] in its main mission in Korea – to disarm and remove the Japanese”.<sup>106</sup> Hodge cabled MacArthur complaining about the KPR's intransigence and requesting advice; MacArthur, as usual, gave Hodge a free hand to deal with his local problems. In December, Hodge publicly declared the KPR and its activities to be unlawful, and the KPR became “public enemies” in the official history of the Occupation.<sup>107</sup>

It was at this point that recognition of the KPR in any form was taken completely off the table. The roots of the American-KPR conflict may have been “inherent in the situation from the beginning, given the ideological incongruities between the Americans and the KPR and the ethnocentric assumptions Americans brought with them to Korea,” but that conflict was pointedly cultivated by an American leadership too set in their ways to search for any sort of compromise or any sort of spin on the KPR’s activities that went against preconceived notions of the KPR as an uncooperative, undesirable alternative to a KDP that was willing to be the “main source of positive support for American plans”.<sup>108</sup>

### **B. Non-Recognition of the KPR as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate a turning point?* The most obvious answer is to remove the KPR from the equation entirely. Had they had less power, or had the KPG been able to get to Korea earlier, there would have been no KPR for the U.S. and the USSR to recognize or not recognize. Assuming both the existence of the KPR and its non-recognition, ways of negating the poor side-effects of that lack of recognition include continuing to involve KPR officials in the

---

106 Cumings, *Origins*, 196.

107 Ibid., 197.

108 Ibid., 149.

government in other capacities and the re-constitution of the KPR as an opposition political party.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* There are multiple rewrites, even limiting our interest to ways of changing this point that would also lessen U.S.-Soviet tensions. Recognition of any sort, including the tacit kind that would come with no legal recognition but also no legal impediments to continued organization, preserves the KPR as a presence in Korean politics; during the months before the KPR was outlawed there were multiple opportunities for the Americans and Koreans to work out arrangements that did not necessitate the dissolution of the KPR and the arrest of its members.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* The answer to this question depends on what we view as the main reason for the American decision not to recognize the KPR. If that reason was a fear of communism in general, then we need to go back several decades, to the development of anti-communism as an ideological aspect of American politics. If that reason was a fear of the Soviet Union as an entity, then we can start creating plausible rewrites as early as the Russian Revolutions in 1917. Going that far back, however, unnecessarily expands and complicates the aim and construction of counterfactual narratives; credible plausible rewrites for our purposes can begin with the start of the 1945 occupation.

{4} *At what level of analysis are rewrites plausible?* At this point, rewrites are plausible at multiple levels. Policy was in flux both in Washington and on the ground in Korea, and U.S. officials were uncertain how the situation in Korea would fit in to their general post-war foreign policy. Changes could be made at an individual level as well: General Hodge was the third man considered to head the military government in Korea, and considering the amount he personally

was involved in Korean politics in general – and how much his own views shaped policy even when the State Department disagreed – and in disempowering the KPR in particular, placing a different commander in his place would change how the KPR was viewed and dealt with.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* As the failure to recognize the KPR was a personal decision by General Hodge rather than a large-scale event, qualifying its redundancy is relatively simple, as there is a single clear chain of events leading up to that decision (as we saw in Section A). But because, at each point in the chain – Hodge's appointment to Korea, the particular composition of the KPR, and the November 1945 refusal to drop “republic” from the name, to list several of the most important ones – there were many possibilities for other outcomes, it is contingent but not redundant, and therefore a good candidate for a turning point.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* Recognizing the KPR, of course, does not solve the problem of it being a leftist government under a distinctly rightist occupying military government (one that, furthermore, was on poor terms with the other, leftist occupying military on the peninsula). It is possible, though not likely, that Korea could end up divided due to the actions of the great powers even with the basis for a unified government.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

#### *Alternate Narrative 1: Troop Withdrawal, Recognition of All-Korean KPR*

One of the most important documents to come from the Military Government was Hodge's December 16, 1945 “Conditions in Korea” report. In a style that would become typical of Cold War documents, it criticized the Soviet command in the North, denounced the Koreans for wanting an independence they weren't ready for, and worried about how susceptible Korea was to communism and Soviet influence. Unique in American discussions at the time, though, he

closed by recommending “we give serious consideration to and agreement with Russia that both the U.S. and Russia withdraw forces from Korea simultaneously and leave Korea to its own devices and an inevitable internal upheaval for its self purification”.<sup>109</sup> Soviet insistence on simultaneous troop withdrawal would eventually become one of the main points of conflict in U.S.-Soviet negotiations over Korea, but this is one of the few times that it was put forth as a possible American policy. This recommendation, from a man who “essentially relied on the Russian bogey as explanation and justification for his actions,” was symptomatic of the assault established American policy was under in Seoul.<sup>110</sup> With conflicting military and political goals and methods – neither the U.S. nor the Soviet Union had given up on multilateral agreements, as the late-December Moscow Agreement demonstrated – the Occupation still had time to backtrack: had it “abandoned its support for the KDP, for the police, for the incipient army, for the KPG, for Rhee; had it undone all this in subsequent months, we might look back on this period as a bad start, an anomaly, a series of mistakes”.<sup>111</sup> Regardless of Hodge's motives in recommending military withdrawal, the fact remains that there was a point in time when the American most supportive of establishing a separate conservative government in the south was willing to leave Korea behind: an act that would, in all likelihood, have forced eventual U.S. recognition of a peninsula-wide KPR government. Thus, despite the vast ideological gulf between the KPR and the United States, there were ways in which the United States could have recognized the KPR, without losing face *or* moving towards the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Simultaneous troop withdrawal at this time would leave the way open for the re-consolidation of the KPR. Once freed from the need to take different policy positions to deal

---

109 Douglas MacArthur, “General of the Army Douglas MacArthur to the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” *FRUS* 1945 VI: 1147-8.

110 Cumings, *Origins*, 211.

111 *Ibid.*, 212.

with their respective occupiers, the northern and southern branches of the KPR could return to their original policy plans, and leverage their popular support and the peoples' committees in both parts of the country to become a true peninsula-wide government. Although Syngman Rhee would later demonstrate a particular talent for winning elections in the south by intimidation, he would not be powerful enough at this time (especially without American backing) to do so; any all-Korea election held in December 1945 would lead to a KPR victory. This would leave the Americans with the choice of either recognizing or not the all-Korean KPR government. While the United States was not averse to declaring communist governments illegitimate (as their Eastern European policy clearly showed), they would have a more difficult time pointing to any sort of Soviet intervention in the Korean elections to show true illegitimacy, especially as any elections under this proposal would take place after the troop withdrawal. Hodge's memo showed a desire to distance the U.S. from Korea, thus, America would likely recognize the KPR-led government in hopes of bringing it further into the American sphere of influence in the future.

With that election victory, the KPR would be able to halt the emergence of two very different state structures that began under the two very different occupiers. The leftist-communist parties – and their people's committees – remained a constant point of similarity in North and South Korea well into 1946. Although the northern and southern branches pursued different policies in their search to coexist with their foreign overseers, the fundamental structure remained the same, as did their mass support. In the North, the Soviets' leveraging of these committees to create a functional, Korean-staffed government elevated the committees (and the parties) to a status of unquestioned legitimacy. In the South, the Americans' anti-Soviet paranoia and assumption that Koreans could not govern themselves made the committees (and the parties)

a target of both military and political attack by the Americans and their hand-picked group of conservative, cooperative Koreans. Nevertheless, the committees continued to command immense popular support in the countryside and urban areas outside of Seoul where American control was weaker, and they – and the remnants of the KPR – were considered much more legitimate representatives of the Koreans by the Koreans than the American-Korean bureaucracy in Seoul. With that basis, and with the chance to rehabilitate the southern peoples' committees outside the influence of the United States, the KPR would then be in possession of a pan-Korean state structure.

Once the KPR becomes the ruling party of an independent Korean nation-state, we see two possible alternate narratives of history emerging: one in which Korea is Soviet-aligned, and one in which Korea is neutral. Of the two, the second is the most likely. Although the political and economic bases of the new nation-state would be socialist, they were Korean socialist rather than Soviet socialist. While this would provide a launching point for a Korean-Soviet alliance, it would probably not be enough to bring Korea entirely into the Soviet sphere of influence. And even were that to happen, it is unlikely that the United States would have seen that as cause for an intervention unless the Soviets established a base there: before the Korean War, Korea was only an American security concern inasmuch as there were Soviet troops on the peninsula.

With the establishment of an independent, unified Korea in late 1945/early 1946 comes the erasure of many of the most contentious U.S.-Soviet clashes in Asia. The United Nations does not have its purpose and legitimacy called into question due to their role in supervising elections in South Korea, and the Soviets have one less reason to boycott Security Council meetings, leading to them being more tightly bound into arenas of international cooperation. The

Korean War, fought in order to reunify Korea, does not happen. The Americans do not have the Soviets in Korea or the North Koreans as an excuse to pursue the same intense anti-communist measures domestically or in Germany as they did in our world. The Soviets do not have to worry about Western troops virtually on their border, and as such are able to take a softer line in negotiations over Germany and other European matters. U.S.-Soviet relations, in short, are shifted so far towards diplomacy that the Cold War consensus does not develop to the extent necessary to declare a state of Cold War between East and West.

*Alternate Narrative 2: No Troop Withdrawal, KPR Recognition Anyway*

Given the American military government's fear of communism, was recognition of the KPR possible without the troop withdrawals? The answer, however improbably, is yes. The story of the occupation is a story of choices, however poor most of those choices turned out to be. The disagreements between nationalists and internationalists in American foreign policy circles clearly demonstrates that up to and beyond the day American forces landed in Korea, there was no single coherent policy for them to follow. General Hodge, bereft of such policy direction, proceeded to institute a military rule more suitable for a defeated than a liberated people due to misinformation from the Japanese and his own fear of the Soviets. The problem was not the lack of an internationalist policy for a united Korea policy, but that the voices of the nationalists and anti-communists were louder and prevented the internationalists from having a voice on the ground. It is entirely possible for recognition of the KPR to have become United States policy, and had that been so, General Hodge would have carried it out – or been replaced by someone who would.

### III. TURNING POINT 2: THE MOSCOW AGREEMENT AND THE JOINT COMMISSION

#### A. The Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers Meeting

The uncomfortable relationship between the Americans and the KPR might have continued indefinitely were it not for the Moscow Conference and the subsequent meltdown in relations between the Americans and the Soviets (and, somewhat by proxy, the northern and southern Koreans) during the imbroglio over trusteeship that followed. The conference and controversy provided the Americans with the excuse they needed to virtually wipe out any remaining power held by leftists in their occupation zone, and by mid-1946, the people's committees were no longer a possible viable basis for reunification.

The Moscow Conference in December of 1945 was the last real chance for a solution to the Korean problem to be solved at the foreign minister level. American Secretary of State James Byrnes, British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov would not meet together again on the Korean issue after releasing the final communique from this conference, and their relationship would quickly deteriorate into conflicts over the European settlements, leaving little chance for another rational look at the situation in Korea. George F. Kennan, then working at the American embassy in Moscow, observed the conference proceedings and criticized Byrnes as only wanting “an agreement for its political effect at home” and speculated that “the Russians knew this [and] will see that for this superficial success he pays a heavy price in the things that are real”.<sup>112</sup> Though an unflattering portrait of Byrnes' skills as a negotiator, Kennan's comments were predictive in one regard: Byrnes was made to pay a price for the compromise he worked out, though it was his own President who, in reversing Byrnes' policy just days after the final communiqué was released, demanded that price. His commentary

---

<sup>112</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967): 287-8.

also reinforces two crucial points: first, at the time of the conference, American skepticism of Soviet intentions was still very much present, despite the relatively low priority given to Korean matters; second, despite such skepticism, the prevailing mood in America – in both public and policy circles – favored continued diplomatic engagement with the Soviets (though not, as Truman's negative reaction demonstrates, to the extent that Byrnes ended up compromising).<sup>113</sup>

The main Korean issue during the Moscow Conference was, unsurprisingly given U.S. wartime planning, trusteeship. The Americans favored a multilateral – or, at the least, bilateral – trusteeship for Korea that was in line with their attitudes toward other immediately post-colonial countries while the Soviets favored a quick independence after liberation (also in keeping with their general policies); by late January 1946 it was clear that despite willingness to discuss trusteeship during the wartime conferences the Soviet Union would not support trusteeship in Korea as either the Americans or British understood it.<sup>114</sup> This policy split was reflected in the two draft statements put forward at the Moscow Conference. The American one “called for the establishment of a joint administration of Korea by the Soviet and American military commands, which [...] would be superseded by a four-power (United States, USSR, China, and Great Britain) trusteeship, which would [...] administer Korea until the country was deemed ready for independence,” a process which could take up to ten years. The Soviet counter-proposal, in turn, provided “for a provisional Korean government and for a Joint Commission (JC) drawn from the Soviet and American commands in Korea that would offer assistance in forming such a

---

113 This conciliatory attitude toward the Soviets earned Byrnes Truman's ire, and made him less willing to compromise on the German question in later CFM meetings, in one of the few explicit connections policymakers made between the two cases. Altering the Moscow Conference meeting thus has beneficial repercussions for Cold War prevention outside of Korea as well.

114 George Kennan, “The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, Moscow, January 25, 1946,” *FRUS* 1946 VIII: 619. For more on the post-war U.S. trusteeship and Soviet public support for unconditional decolonization, see, for example, Roger E. Kanet, ed., *The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the Third World* and Harold Karan Jacobson, “Our 'Colonial' Problem in the Pacific” in *Foreign Affairs* 39.

government,” with trusteeship relegated to just one possible path to follow after the formation of the government.<sup>115</sup> It was this draft, with minor amendments, that became the basis for the final communique.

The final communique on Korea was divided into four parts: Section 1 called for a provisional government to be established; Section 2 allowed for a joint commission (JC) of representatives from the American and Soviet commands; Section 3 contains the first appearance of the word “trusteeship” and assigns the JC the role of consulting with the Korean provisional government and various Korean democratic organizations and “helping and assisting (trusteeship)” Korea's progress towards independence; Section 4 set a date for a meeting between the occupation commands within the next two weeks.<sup>116</sup>

This document represents the United States at the most conciliatory towards the Soviet Union it would ever be in regards to Korea, and signaled the single biggest shift on United States policy toward Korea since Korea became a strategic interest in 1941. It featured recognition that the Koreans could govern themselves, had firm Soviet support, and, most importantly, it called for the formation of a Korean government before trusteeship would be considered. Because of the gestalt shift the agreement represented, “everything depended on how the agreement was implemented and on how it was received in Korea. Careful Soviet-American cooperation and strict adherence to the text itself were essential”.<sup>117</sup>

In our world, proper implementation of the Moscow Agreement hit an immediate brick wall in the form of General Hodge, who had long ago decided that his opinions on Korea should have the most weight. Anxious to not involve the Soviets in the administration of his part of

---

115 Cumings, *Origins*, 216.

116 “Communiqué on the Moscow Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the Soviet Union, United States of America and United Kingdom, December 27, 1945,” *FRUS* 1945 II: 820-821.

117 Cumings, *Origins*, 217.

Korea, he had been mounting a preemptive propaganda strike against just the sort of eventuality the Moscow Agreement represented: he had “tried to find cooperative groups of Koreans who would unite behind the essentially unilateral actions that he and his advisors had taken in the first three months of the occupation”.<sup>118</sup> With the KDP filling that role, and expressing their wish for trusteeship (should it be necessary at all) to be a wholly American affair, Hodge found himself in an uncomfortable position when the Moscow Agreement was published in Seoul at the end of December. Although briefly attempting to “point out to Koreans that the actual text of the Moscow Agreement emphasized the setting up of a provisional government before trusteeship,” his main acts were to give tacit support to the growing rightist anti-trusteeship movement and to inflame anti-Soviet sentiment by stating – quite contrary to fact – that it was the Soviets who originally supported trusteeship and the Americans who opposed it.<sup>119</sup> Although initial opposition to the Moscow Agreement developed independent of liberal/conservative affiliations, with Hodge's help, agreement or disagreement ceased to become about whether a Korean was in favor of their country's immediate independence or not, and instead became a referendum on their political beliefs, communist/Soviet-sympathizer status, and trustworthiness.

In the North, the Soviets went into damage control mode. In late January, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) issued a denunciation of U.S. accusations, including a full description of both the U.S. and Soviet proposals at the conference and ending by suggesting “the Korean newspapers were victims of false and unscrupulous information”.<sup>120</sup> TASS and the Soviet military in Korea spent much of early 1946 attempting to counteract American spin of the Moscow Conference, especially in the North where they were trying to organize the political

---

118 Cumings, *Origins*, 219.

119 *Ibid.*, 220.

120 Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union, “TASS Statement on the Korean Question,” in *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)* 10.

groups to present to the Joint Commission as the basis of a new Korean government.

The chaotic response in the days immediately after the announcement of the Moscow decision set the tone for the future work that the JC would attempt. Rather than becoming a forum for representatives of two military governments to lay the foundations of an independent Korean state, it became a forum for semantic debates about the meaning of “trusteeship,” “agreement” with the Moscow Declaration, and “democratic” Korean organizations to be consulted. The JC almost immediately went on a nearly year-long hiatus because of those debates, while the political scenes in the two occupation zones became even more polarized: in the South, the United States helped Syngman Rhee quash leftist uprisings in the fall of 1946, and in the North, Kim Il Sung started to keep more moderate nationalists out of power, despite Soviet attempts to bring all Northern parties in line with their position on the Moscow declaration and quick independence to preclude the need for a trusteeship.<sup>121</sup>

### **B. The Joint Commission As A Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate a turning point?* The Moscow Conference, as part of a series of Council of Foreign Ministers meetings provided for by the conditions of the wartime Big Three alliance, cannot reasonably be prevented or removed from consideration of Korean counterfactuals during this time period. Mitigating the damaging effects of the conference, however, requires only small, reasonable changes to the actions of the American military officials in the days immediately following the release of the Moscow Communiqué. Had Hodge not been willing to act more reasonably, there is still the possibility that diplomats in Washington and Moscow could have forced the JC into a more reasonable, functional form.

---

<sup>121</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the situation in the South see Cumings, *Origins*, 215-239; for the political situation in the North see Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, 55-56, 68-70, 123.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* Preventing or stalling the establishment of the JC introduces too many complications into the counterfactual, so I will be focusing only on alterations. The JC operated for nearly a year and a half, during which time there are plenty of opportunities to alter its actions. Much of that time it spent adjourned, while members of the American State Department and Soviet Foreign Ministry tried to reconcile the differences brought up by the occupation commanders (who themselves were only sporadically in touch). The differing opinions of the Korean factions towards the JC also complicated matters, and changing any of the variables could result in a much more positive outcome.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* Credible plausible rewrites become possible immediately after the issuance of the Moscow Declaration to the Korean public and U.S. and Soviet military authorities.

{4} *At what level of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Rewrites are most plausible here at the personal level. The deadlock in the Joint Commission, while somewhat reflective of the overall poor state of U.S.-Soviet relations, was ultimately the fault of the delegation heads. Whereas in Germany the military leaders had found areas of cooperation even when the politicians couldn't, there was no corresponding desire for commonality in Korea.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* While the Moscow Conference itself is redundant, the JC is not: it would not have existed but for the Conference. Removing the influence of the JC by preventing its creation is possible by altering the nature of the Moscow Conference, however, those alterations are not plausible given both the occupiers' desires for a bipartite oversight group in Korea.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* Had the terms of the Moscow Agreement been properly implemented by the American and Soviet military governments in Korea, it is unlikely that the unified Korean state that emerged could be re-divided, either by the Koreans or by outside powers.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

The main point of conflict between American and Soviet representatives on the JC was the question of which Koreans should be allowed to participate in the JC's discussions. The original criteria were that a group be democratic and support the Moscow Agreement. But due to American misinformation in the South, there were few if any groups who were both recognized by the Military Government and supportive of the Moscow Agreement. In the North, the overwhelming majority of the political and social groups understood that trusteeship was not mandated by the Moscow Agreement and saw the JC as their best chance to come to an agreement for Korean self-governance that did not necessitate trusteeship, but those groups were leftist-communist and not recognized by the Americans, who charged that they only accepted the Moscow Agreement under duress from the Soviets. Semantic debates about the meaning of “democratic” occupy much of the space in the letters between the State Department and the Foreign Ministry about the Joint Commission.<sup>122</sup>

Despite that, those letters reflect a genuine desire to work together, even if a genuine desire to do what was best for the Koreans is lacking. Contrary to Germany, where ministerial-level discussions undid or stalled progress made by military officials in the Allied Control Council, in Korea the military officials were content to hold a silent standoff across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel while their ministers tried to convince them to talk to each other. Even when the JC

---

<sup>122</sup> For these letters see *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question*, 11-36.

reconvened after its hiatuses with apparent progress, Hodge's own predilections towards which Koreans should be involved brought matters to a halt again. Many of the problems with the JC stemmed from the lack of communication between the State Department and the military government. Hodge technically was supposed to report to MacArthur, but in reality, MacArthur let him do whatever he liked within reason – and MacArthur used a *very* loose definition of reason. Similarly, while the State Department had political advisors on the ground in Korea, they let them have fairly free reign – and those advisors almost always agreed with Hodge. Better oversight or clearer instructions from the State Department could have kept the JC from devolving into an endless stalemate.

The presence of Korean representatives at the JC would probably not have made a difference unless the representatives from the South were a true mix of leftist and rightist leaders, and few things short of a direct order to stubborn, Russophobe Hodge would have made that possible. It is not implausible that the State Department could have given that order. Korea was becoming less important as events in Eastern Europe unfolded, and the State Department wanted the Korean issue handled quickly and quietly – had they decided that ordering Hodge to cooperate with the Soviets would have achieved that goal better than letting him do as he pleased, much of the conflict would have been solved.

Getting Korean representatives to the JC is the hard part. When the commission first formed in early 1946, the remnants of the KPR were still present enough to constitute an influential force in the north-south discussions, which in and of itself would be valuable progress towards unification. With a left-leaning Korean coalition in talks with the JC and acting as a balance between the Americans and the Soviets, a neutral Korea (in the eventual Austrian model)

that satisfied both American and Soviet security concerns and Korean nationalism could emerge. Even had it taken longer for the Korean delegations to the JC to be decided upon – had it been postponed, for example, to after the KPR had completely disappeared from the south – as long as a mix of Korean political orientations were represented at the JC such a neutral Korea is possible.

Unifying Korea through the JC leaves open the trusteeship question. Despite northern groups' public commitment to the Moscow Agreement in its entirety, the Soviets Union made it clear that it was not in favor of trusteeship. And even among the most supportive conservatives in the South, the Americans found only grudging acceptance of American-led trusteeship – and then only as an alternative to joint American-Soviet trusteeship, not to immediate independence.<sup>123</sup> The most likely outcome, then, is a neutral Korea with no trusteeship, with simultaneous Soviet-American troop withdrawals removing Korea from its uncomfortable position locked between the two great powers.

#### **IV. TURNING POINT 3: KOREA AT THE UNITED NATIONS**

##### **A. The Korean Question at the United Nations**

By late 1947, the Americans were ready to give up the Joint Commission as a lost cause. Rather than continuing to try to work with the Soviets and the Korean leftists, they would take their problem to the UN. The nationalists who had been the prevailing voices in U.S. policy circles until this point realized that they would no longer be able to work on the Korean question alone. Events were picking up speed, and they needed to have international support for their nationalist actions. So they did what had, until then, been the unthinkable: they took their case to the United Nations, and involved the newly formed organization in creating, rather than just

---

<sup>123</sup> Cumings, *Origins*, 222.

maintaining, peace for the first time. On 14 November 1947, the UN General Assembly approved the creation of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to supervise elections in Korea. The Commission consisted of representatives from Australia, Canada, China, El Salvador, France, India, the Philippines, Syria, and the Ukrainian SSR, although the Ukrainian representative declined his appointment in keeping with Soviet non-recognition of the UN's authority on the Korean question.

The UNTCOK decided in February of 1948 to go ahead with supervising southern-only elections, provoking widespread disagreement across the entire peninsula. Although Syngman Rhee and the KDP were pleased at the chance to form their own internationally-recognized government, “the overwhelming majority of Koreans, on the other hand, opposed the election and the division that would result. Southern political leaders, including conservatives, sent word to the north that they wanted to create a united opposition to the elections”.<sup>124</sup> Over 540 southern and northern delegates met in Pyongyang in March for the North-South Political Leaders' Coalition Conference and announced their opposition to the elections and the continued presence of foreign troops in Korea.

These elections eventually did take place, over the objections of the Koreans. In April, representatives from fifty-six political parties and social organizations sent a message to the American and Soviet governments calling for simultaneous troop withdrawal and a halt to the election plans, declaring that “the Korean people will never agree to the holding of separate elections in the South and will hinder it by all the means at their disposal”.<sup>125</sup> On behalf of the

---

124 Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 85-6.

125 United Conference of Representatives of Northern and Southern Korea, “Message of the United Conference of Representatives of Northern and Southern Korea to the Governments of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. on the Withdrawal of Foreign Troops from Korea,” April 23, 1948, in *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)*, 67.

twenty-seven million Koreans, they “protest[ed] against the unlawful decisions of the General Assembly and the Interim Committee of the United Nations organization, which were adopted without the participation and against the wishes of the Korean people” and accused the UNTCOK of “being employed for the splitting of Korea”.<sup>126</sup>

### **B. The South Korean Elections as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate a turning point?* The elections that the UNTCOK ended up supervising were the final step in the legal division of Korea, and, with their given outcome, hard to negate *post facto*. There are, however, multiple times during the decision-making process leading up to the elections where the negative effects of the UN's involvement could have been prevented.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* Different choices at the previous turning points would have prevented the UNTCOK from forming and therefore from having to make the choice to hold elections. A point not discussed as a unique turning point but that would prevent this one from happening is the moment when the Korean issue was brought before the UN in the first place: it was by no means a certainty that the US would decide to go searching for international justification for their favored south Korean government, or that the UN would agree to involve themselves at all, much less in the specific way that they did. Additionally, different decisions by the General Assembly (e.g. acceptance of the Soviet rather than American plan) would remove the necessity for the UNTCOK to make a choice about holding elections.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* The Korean question

---

<sup>126</sup> United Conference of Representatives of Northern and Southern Korea, “On the Withdrawal of Foreign Troops from Korea,” 67.

was brought to the UN as a result of the failure of the Joint Commission to come close to an agreement, so plausible rewrites could theoretically begin with the formation of the JC. To avoid repeating the previous section, however, I will only look at rewrites beginning from the UN's consideration of the Korean question.

{4} *At what level of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Plausible rewrites here exist only on the personal level: with each member of the UNTCOK who voted for elections to be held, and with the Soviet officials responsible for keeping the UNTCOK observers out of North Korea.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* As in the case of KPR recognition, the UN elections are relatively non-redundant. There are two main causal chains leading to the UN's decision to supervise southern-only elections: one in the UN itself, and one in the USSR that caused Soviet dismissal of the UN's authority. However, the Soviet chain is somewhat dependent upon the UN chain: it is possible to alter the UN's actions enough to render the Soviet's choices moot, or it is possible to alter only the UN chain, or only the Soviet chain.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* Had the UN not decided to hold elections only in South Korea, second-order counterfactuals would be employed to bring Korea back to its real-world divided status. These options range from the UN declining to supervise elections at all and thus leaving the situation in Korea relatively unchanged to wildly disparate election results on either side of the thirty-eighth parallel leading to the gridlock moving from the JC to the UN.

### **C. Alternate Outcomes**

The UN recognized the government that formed in the South after these elections as the sole representative government *in* Korea, not *of* Korea, a distinction that seemed lost on the new Korean governmental officials and, occasionally, on their American allies as well. The official

formation of the North Korean state followed shortly after, and the superpowers' security commitments to their Korean allies would become the basis of multiple future Soviet-American disputes in Asia.

*Alternate Narrative 1: No Elections*

The UN General Assembly left it to the UNTCOK to decide if they would hold elections in the south if they were denied entry into the north. The commission made that choice by a 5-3 vote. Had the vote deadlocked, or gone the other way, it is difficult to determine exactly how the Korean situation would have changed from its pre-UN days. The one virtual certainty, however, is that Korea would have to wait much longer for independence or unification while the superpowers regrouped and re-evaluated their Korean policy. An inconclusive UN vote would preserve the status quo in Korea, with perhaps slight modifications: the Americans would have faced a large setback on the international stage, though the extent to which that would have altered their policies in Korea on reunification is not easily discernible from the existing record. It would certainly be a propaganda victory for the Soviets, and it would elevate Korea to an international issue that would remain in the public eye, despite the Korean question's growing unpopularity in the American public's opinion. Consideration of the unification question would likely devolve back to the Joint Commission, or a similar replacement body, perhaps with UN oversight.

It is not clear whether the UN declining to supervise any elections in Korea in 1948 would entirely prevent the ultimate division of Korea, or simply postpone it. But this alternate narrative ties more deeply to the German case than any other Korean turning point does apart from the Korean War, because Korea was one of two soon-to-be-divided countries that the UN

was considering in 1948, contemporaneous with its work on solving the Berlin Blockade. America's failure to garner UN approval for its plans for Korea – from a commission that included no fewer than six countries with much closer ties to it than to the Soviet Union no less – would negatively impact its ability to sway the less-friendly General Assembly on the German question, and push the blockade's resolution in a more neutral or Soviet-friendly direction. So even if, in the narrative, the division of Korea is only delayed, it is not inconceivable that the Cold War could be prevented anyway due to the decisions secondary effects on the German question.

*Alternate Narrative 2: Simultaneous Elections*

But what if the UNTCOK observers had been allowed into North Korea? The Soviets had been insistent throughout the previous UN sessions that because the UN had no authority to consider the Korean question at all, observers would not be allowed into the Soviet zone. It is not improbable to imagine that that position might have changed over the course of the commission's work; indeed, such changes were evident even in our world. Although Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky argued against including Korea on the UN General Assembly's agenda at all in September 1947, once it was included, UN Ambassador Andrei Gromyko demonstrated his willingness to work within the UN by presenting the Soviets' own plan of simultaneous troop withdrawal and the inclusion of elected Korean representatives in the Assembly's deliberations.<sup>127</sup>

After the Soviet proposals were defeated in a vote largely split between Soviet and American allies, Gromyko, Molotov, and Stalin made the decision to not cooperate with the UN observers

---

<sup>127</sup> Andrei Vyshinsky, "Excerpt from a Speech by A. Y. Vyshinsky at the Plenary Meeting of the Second Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 23, 1947," in *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question*, 35-38; Andrei Gromyko, "Statement by A. A. Gromyko at the Sitting of the Political Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, October 28, 1947" and "Speech by A. A. Gromyko at the Plenary Meeting of the Second Session of the United Nations General Assembly, November 13, 1947" in *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question*, 49-54, 55-65.

in Korea as a protest against what they viewed as illegal and illogical actions, gambling that that protest would be more beneficial to them than cooperation.

But consider a scenario in which the Soviets' cost-benefit analysis went the other way, and election observers were allowed into North Korea. The Soviets would thus gain international goodwill from the Western countries, while using their actions in front of the General Assembly to protect themselves from accusations of selling out their fellow communists. While Syngman Rhee's rightists would probably still win at the polls in South Korea due to the American-supported political situation there, the communists would be the victors in the North. Although the U.S. demonstrated a willingness during the Cold War to ignore UN recommendations that they disagreed with (as with the Bramuglia plan for Germany discussed in Chapter 2), and accusations of election fraud in the North would probably be made, the Soviets would be confident enough in communist superiority and mindful enough of their still-precarious international position to avoid any tampering. The UNTCOK would then have to certify election results in both halves of Korea, leading to the formation of a single unified Korean government.

The alignment of this unified Korea is debatable. The proportional representation system used by the UNTCOK in setting up elections would likely give the rightists more members in the new National Assembly, as the south had two-thirds of the population to the north's one-third, though some more leftist members from the south may gain seats as well. Cheju Island, for example, was a leftist stronghold that rebelled against the holding of separate elections before becoming victims to a violent massacre led by Rhee supporters in the military and aided by U.S. forces. Their votes against Rhee were subsequently annulled, but had they been allowed to participate in truly all-Korean democratic elections, they would have contributed to the leftist

groups in the National Assembly. Although the rightist majority would try to tie Korea more tightly to the U.S., it is not immediately apparent that they would be able to do so without the consent of the opposition groups in the Assembly. Similarly, any inclinations the leftists in the Assembly had to make Korea only a Soviet ally (inclinations that would, in any case, be weaker than those of the rightists) would be blocked. The most likely outcome is an enforced-neutrality situation, similar to that that took hold in Austria. The United States was already looking for a way to make a graceful exit from Korea, and such a treaty would satisfy the Soviets that even a rightist-dominated Korea would not be used to launch a new attack on them.

Ultimately, the precise alignment of Korea resulting from this turning point is less important than the fact of the Soviet Union's cooperation with the UN. Allowing UN observers into the North would be an incredible sign of good faith from them, and would increase their global standing in a way that virtually nothing else could. Not only would it work to improve U.S.-Soviet relations on a personal level, it would also increase the legitimacy of the UN as an arena in which the superpowers could solve their problems diplomatically. Cooperating to oversee Korean elections in the UN would be beneficial for the Koreans, and fundamentally alter the nature of superpower relations in such a way that the Cold War would not be able to develop to the extent that it did.

## **V. TURNING POINT 4: THE KOREAN WAR**

### **A. Preventing the Korean War**

The Korean War is probably the most contentious aspect of Korean history, from the beginnings of the war to the strategies employed to the terms of the eventual ceasefire. Given the

Korean War's 25 June 1950 start date, it may seem an odd choice as a launching point for counterfactual histories without the Cold War, as the Cold War is generally understood to be well underway by that time: Germany and Korea had been divided, the Soviets had nuclear weapons, and Eastern Europe had solidified into one large communist bloc, not necessarily by choice. But taking such a view overlooks two key facts.

First, the Korean War was the first large-scale militarization of the Cold War. Previous so-called proxy wars either failed to significantly involve one of the superpowers (e.g. the Greek Civil War, from which the Soviets were conspicuously absent) or were not viewed by one or both powers as having global or Cold War significance. Preventing or altering the Korean War, then, prevents or alters the militarization of the global conflict and is consistent with the definition of preventing the Cold War as laid out in Chapter 1. Second, the Korean War was a civil war that did not need a global Cold War consensus in order to take place, even though the superpowers viewed it within that consensus.<sup>128</sup> Both Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee had been trying to gain support from their superpower allies for a military assault against the other for several years before the official beginning of the war in 1950. Syngman Rhee pressured the United States to allow him to embark on a “march to the North” to unify Korea even before the legal establishment of two Korean states. Kim Il Sung repeatedly asked the Soviets to aid him in an attack against the South. But leaders on both the American and Soviet sides worked to restrain the Korean leaders, and “by late 1949 [...] both sides understood that their big power guarantors would not help them if they launched an unprovoked general attack – or even an assault on

---

128 There has been much excellent scholarship on the extent to which the Korean War was an internal civil war that became a militarized proxy war versus a proxy war from the outset, and I will not attempt to replicate it all here. Rather, I will briefly go through some of the most recent and salient primary sources from Russian archives. Most orthodox works consider the Korean War a proxy war, while revisionist and post-revisionist works recognize the autonomy of the Koreans and regard great power involvement as interference in a civil war.

Ongjin or Ch'orwon,” two strategically important areas along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>129</sup> By the time of the attack in 1950, of course, this had shifted: both Moscow and Washington came to the aid of their Korean allies, and Russian archival evidence suggests that Moscow had a hand in approving Kim's invasion plans.

All of this, however, need not be attributed to Cold War politics. It is notable that in the (admittedly incomplete) set of Russian documents pertaining to the start and course of the Korean War, the only mentions made of the United States in relation to Soviet foreign policy by Stalin and his ministers are in the context of avoiding direct fighting with the Americans. This avoidance, Kathryn Weathersby suggests, was Stalin's “foremost concern” through the entire war.<sup>130</sup> Stalin's actions with regards to North Korea are more consistent with those of a superpower towards a small but important ally than with those of a superpower towards a sacrificial proxy. The 25 June attack that began the conventional Korean War followed on from a year and a half of sustained cross-border conflict along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and the fact that this time the attack was supported by the Soviets (and the Soviet-prodded Chinese) does not detract from the fact that it was planned by Kim's government and executed by his troops.

Just as there remains conflict over the exact nature of the Korean War, there remains controversy over the exact start of the war. Conventional scholarship names the North Koreans (and occasionally the Soviets) as the instigators. However, given the chaotic situation of the first few hours and days of the war it is possible that we will never know for sure who fired first. Given each side's understanding that they would receive support only in the case of their

---

129 Bruce Cumings and Kathryn Weathersby, “An Exchange on Korean War Origins,” in Kathryn Weathersby, ed., *New Evidence on the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Cold War International History Project, 1995), 121.

130 Kathryn Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” in *New Evidence on the Korean War*, 32. This is reinforced by the fact that Stalin did not approve military action by the North until late January 1950, after Dean Acheson's 12 January speech that removed Korea from the United States' security perimeter.

response to an unprovoked attack, it is not surprising that official stories differ on this point. Official U.S. military history states that it was the North Koreans who began “fighting began on the Ongjin peninsula at 4a.m. with a North Korean attack on Southern positions, hours later spreading eastward along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel,” while the Northern story goes that “the South had been shelling Northern positions on the Ongjin peninsula for over a day when, in the early morning of June 25, troops from the ROK Seventeenth Regiment moved north across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel toward Haeju”.<sup>131</sup> The North's version is not as unbelievable as it has been previously treated. John Gunther, General MacArthur's biographer, was told by a member of the U.S. occupation staff that the South had attacked the North on 25 June, but he simply assumed the staff member had gotten the story backward, and the movement of forces makes the North's version eminently plausible.<sup>132</sup> Martin Hart-Landsberg concludes, after a review of the political and military situations on both sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and concludes that “the best explanation of what happened on June 25 is that Syngman Rhee deliberately initiated the fighting and then successfully blamed the North”<sup>133</sup>.

Regardless of who the immediate instigators were on 25 June, the first few months of the war went exceedingly poorly for the South Koreans. Within days Syngman Rhee had moved his government from Seoul to Pusan, and by December after the Chinese communists had entered the war, the force commander in Korea was advocating serious consideration of moving the government out of Korea altogether and establishing a government-in-exile in either Japan or Nationalist China.<sup>134</sup> The conservative government was already unpopular, and their war even

---

131 Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 119.

132 Ibid., 120.

133 Ibid., 121.

134 Korea Daily Summary, 21 December 1950. Papers of Harry S. Truman, Staff Member and Office Files: National Security Council File; Central Intelligence Agency File, 1947-1953; Box 1; Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

more so, and given that unpopularity “there is every reason to believe that [the Korean War] would have ended quickly if the United States had not intervened” and that that intervention only came about because “Truman, desperate for a crisis that could be blamed on the Soviet Union, jumped at the chance to intervene in what was in fact a Korean civil war”.<sup>135</sup> The intervention of U.S.-U.N. forces on the side of the South Koreans, and of the Chinese on the side of the North Koreans, forced the war to drag on for nearly three years, during much of which fighting was concentrated along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as peace negotiations progressed. But when the fighting *was* peninsula-wide and contentious, there were multiple points at which the entire outcome of the war could have been changed. In the next few sections, I will concentrate on these points and the alternative historical narratives of the war that could have emerged from them and focus on two alternate outcomes – total victory by the North or the South – and how they could have been achieved.

### **B. The Korean War as a Turning Point**

{1} *What do we have to do to negate the turning point?* Negating this turning point takes three separate forms: either the war would not happen at all (a highly unlikely proposition given the state of relations between two Koreas in 1950, no matter if it is treated as an internal Korean matter or a great power proxy war), or either the North or the South could win a decisive victory. Although there were chances to prevent the war, as seen above, it would simply take too long for reunification to result for it to stop the developing Cold War, therefore, in the interests of space, I

---

<sup>135</sup> Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 12, 98. The Soviets also believed that any civil war started by the North needed to be won quickly in order to prevent American intervention. Their belief that the conditions necessary for a quick victory were not present in September 1949, but could be created in time, was the main reason the Politburo gave for refusing to allow Kim to attack at that moment; it was not until they were confident in such conditions that they supported military action by the North. See Document V, “Politburo decision to confirm the following directive to the Soviet ambassador in Korea, 24 September 1949” in Cold War International History Project *Bulletin* 5, 7.

shall consider only the two cases in which either the North or the South wins a decisive victory and unifies the country.

{2} *How many plausible rewrites can be found that might prevent, alter, or stall the turning point?* Preventing, altering, or stalling the Korean War in 1950 can be achieved by two broad categories of actions: those that unify Korea in some way before 1950, and those that use superpower negotiations or intervention in early 1950 to calm the tensions across the parallel and put off the start of the war. Any of the counterfactuals resulting from the turning points considered above leading to a unified Korea would prevent anything similar to the Korean War from happening. The United States could prevent a North Korean attack (and thus the Korean War as we know it) by leaving a token force in Korea which, “without a spoken or written word, would have informed the North Koreans and their friends that the United States did not intend to stand idly by in case of an attack,” or U.S. officials might have “made it clear that it would give full support to United Nations collective action in case of attack upon the Republic”.<sup>136</sup> Alternately had the U.S. pursued a non-UN solution, “it might have been compelled to be more realistic in defining its commitments to the Republic in the period before June 1950 and this might have served as an effective deterrent to aggression.”<sup>137</sup> We can alter the outcome of the war by changing the circumstances or fact of the Chinese entry into the war, or by changing the outcome of any number of smaller battles over the course of the war.

{3} *How far back must we go to find credible plausible rewrites?* In order to rewrite the history of the Korean War, we must first decide when the war started. Although the North Koreans began a coordinated advance into South Korea on 25 June 1950, heavy skirmishing

---

<sup>136</sup> Goodrich, *U.S. Policy in the United Nations*, 100-101.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

between North and South Korean troops along the thirty-eighth parallel had been a problem since the formation of the two states. In order to avoid the complexities of the military situation along the border – a military situation we do not have clear documentation of – it is possible to say that since the Korean War was a civil war, we can start looking for rewrites as soon as the political division of North and South Korea was accomplished in 1948. Rewriting the war from that point, however, introduces too many contingencies. In order to keep the counterfactuals compliant with plausible-world criteria, I will examine the situation only from 25 June 1950 onwards.

{4} *At what level of analysis are rewrites plausible?* Rewrites of the Korean War are plausible mostly on a personal level. Both Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee advocated violent reunification of their country from the beginnings of their times as leaders, and whether they would actually go through with their plans was largely a question of whether they could count on support from their great power allies. Changing the decisions made by Mao, Stalin, and the Korean and UN generals in the field are the best way to change the outcome of the war.

{5} *How redundant is the turning point?* The Korean War is the most redundant of the turning points examined in this chapter. North and South Korea were on the brink of war from virtually the moment they were created; the only question seemed to be *when* a war would break out. There were multiple causal chains leading to the outbreak of the war as it happened, and alterations in any one of them would, while not necessarily prevent the war, cause the nature of the war to shift enough for our purposes.

{6} *What about second-order counterfactuals?* Once reunified through war, the probability of subsequent disunity depends on who won the war, so the probability of these second-order counterfactuals will be discussed in more detail below.

### C. Alternate Outcomes

The ceasefire that ended hostilities in the Korean War solidified the dividing line roughly along the thirty-eighth parallel over the objections of Korean leaders on both sides who continued to press their allies for a total military situation. Given the positions of the opposing forces at the time when the ceasefire was signed, there were no other realistic options for a dividing line. But what happens if we change the positions of the forces before the ceasefire agreement was reached?

Had the Korean War ended with a Northern victory in the first few months, “those who supported the Korean People's Republic would have had another opportunity to build a democratic Korea.”<sup>138</sup> At this point in 1950, with the original southern people's committees destroyed and the original leaders of the KPR either dead or discredited, rehabilitation of the KPR would not be a simple task: the South Korean bureaucracy would need to be dismantled, the people's committees re-established, and a way to deal with the Rhee government devised. But Northern soldiers on the march south re-established people's committees as they went, providing once again the basis for a peninsula-wide government. And the fact that they viewed their mission in South Korea as one of reintegration of area rightfully belonging to their state rather than one of conquest of a foreign country meant that they focused on preserving and modifying, rather than destroying, economic and political infrastructure. Although the United States would not be involved militarily in the war in this scenario, they would likely provide logistical support to the Rhee government – and government-in-exile, if it came to that, since the U.S. defended the South Korean elections as perfectly legitimate when even the UN would offer only a lukewarm “close enough”. A Northern victory later on during the war would mean more time necessary for

---

<sup>138</sup> Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 12.

rebuilding, and give the United States more time to gather support for Rhee's government in the UN. The unified Korea that resulted would thus be tilted further towards neutral than to the Soviet Union, but would still not be enough to prolong the Cold War.

A Southern victory would be less beneficial, both to Korea and to the state of American-Soviet affairs. Had the UN Command and the South Korean forces won, they would have encountered even less popular support in the North than they commanded in the South. While this probably would not have led to a re-dividing of Korea, it is likely that the northerners would re-join with their leftist colleagues in the south to take advantage of the wartime chaos to stage an uprising against both the Rhee government and the foreign troops reminiscent of those in 1946-47 (though better organized with the experience of northern communists). Additionally, the Soviet Union would now have combined UN-U.S.-South Korean troops on its borders, giving it a reason to take a more personal interest in the Korean War. Thus we find discord rather than necessarily disunity, and substantially reduce our chances of finding a way to reach our goal of preventing the Cold War.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The story of the Korean occupation is a complicated one, and though parts of it may never become entirely clear, what is certain is that the occupation was a long string of contingencies, on both sides of the thirty-eighth parallel.

Not every possible alternate answer to the Korean question is a beneficial one, to the Koreans, the Americans, the Soviets, or all three. A U.S.-aligned unified Korea, in the forms possible in the late 1940s, would have been difficult to achieve. Even though the sort of

communism that was gaining acceptance during and immediately post-war was infused with uniquely Korean aspects and often at odds with Soviet and Chinese communism, it was still communism, and distrustful of the seeming continuation of colonial Japanese rule represented by the capitalist American policies. The communist revolution was coming to colonial Korea whether the U.S. liked it or not, all the presence of the military government did was prevent the revolution from reaching the entire peninsula. And even had the U.S. managed to install its favored conservatives in power over a unified peninsula, the backlash from the populace would have been immediate, organized, and likely successful, thus putting the U.S. in the awkward but increasingly familiar position of attempting to prop up an undemocratic, unrepresentative regime at the expense of its international reputation while the Russians scolded them. Whether the communist Korea would have aligned totally with the USSR is difficult to predict because Korean communism never had a chance to develop in an independent state for more than a few years, but it would have been Soviet-leaning or neutral, not U.S.-aligned.

Not every possible alternate answer eases U.S.-Soviet tensions and prevents the Cold War, either. If, for instance, the Korean War had ended with a total victory for the South, the Soviets would then have been facing hostile American troops immediately across their border, a situation even less conducive to diplomacy than having American and Soviet troops facing each other across the thirty-eighth parallel.

But we do not need *every* alternate answer to lead us to a better conclusion. We have seen in this chapter how deeply interconnected Korea and the superpowers' Korean policies were to the developing global, American, and Soviet Cold War consensuses. Korea was in some respects a test case for elements of U.S. policy: "not only were the broad outlines of U.S. foreign policy

toward Korea in large measure shaped by overall U.S. foreign policy interests, but developments on the Korean peninsula proved invaluable in helping the United States realize those very same interests".<sup>139</sup> When the rollback policy that met its first test in the Korean War failed, for instance, it made no further appearances in official American foreign policy discourse. With that connection, and with ways to unify Korea and create a neutral or Soviet-aligned state possible at each of the turning points discussed, we can see that had one of those paths been taken, the Cold War could have been prevented.

---

<sup>139</sup> Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 98.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past two chapters, we have seen multiple points in time at which the divisions of Germany and Korea both could have been avoided. And we have seen how, at each of those points, preventing the divisions with small alterations brings American-Soviet tensions down to a reasonable level and prevents the development of Cold War hostilities both diplomatic and military. Recognition that Germany and Korea were important parts of American and Soviet policymaking decisions during the pre- and early Cold War years is hardly novel, but the sort of systematic, point-by-point examination conducted here illuminates just how deeply American and Soviet policies towards each other and towards the nature of the post-war international system were impacted by events in and policies concerning Germany and Korea. We have been able to examine in more detail the exact events in Germany and Korea that shaped American and Soviet policies, and the effects that earlier reunifications could have had on post-war American-Soviet relations. And the results of this counterfactual experiment are clear: there are multiple points at which early reunification of Germany or Korea – or both – lead us to a world where the Cold War as we know it does not happen. National consciousnesses of fear do not develop in the United States or the Soviet Union, competing ideologies do not necessitate the splitting of the world into two clashing blocs, and the Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* do not set the global doomsday clock to two minutes to the apocalypse.

This has numerous implications: practical, theoretical, and methodological ones spanning several different fields. First and most obviously, it challenges the basic notions of the Cold War as an inevitable conflict, whatever the reasons for that inevitability might be. If the Cold War is

not inevitable, then, what different lessons might we draw from it? The U.S.-Soviet bipolar system that existed during the Cold War has since been advanced as the canonical example of a stable bipolar system by some theorists – what do different interpretations of its start mean for the ways in which theories of international relations are developed and understood in a highly contingent world? I will discuss possible answers to both those questions later on, but first, it is worthwhile to examine more closely the counterfactual methodology underlying this project and evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, and level of import for projects of this sort.

## **II. SOME COMMENTS ON METHODOLOGY**

Counterfactual history as a concept is not a new idea; the rigorous and careful construction of counterfactual histories as part of an academic study is, especially when that academic study is part of the political science or international relations disciplines. And even now, as counterfactual studies are slowly becoming more prevalent, their level of acceptance within the academic community is still quite low.

### **A. Benefits**

One of the most compelling arguments for continuing to involve counterfactuals in political science is that they foster an alternative way of looking at history, and at how history shapes domestic and foreign policy and theories of international relations specifically. Rather than seeing events as stepping stones along the way to an ultimate goal – be it a theory, a state of country-country relationships, or another event – we can better examine each event as a discrete entity in and of itself. From there, we gain a better idea of where the events fit in to the larger historical and political narratives.

By answering the question “what would change and how if this event were modified in these specific ways?” we are also answering the questions “in what ways were future happening contingent upon this event playing out the exact way that it did in our world?” and “why did this event happen exactly the way that it did?” – questions that are often overlooked in traditional studies and whose answers, when sought, are obscured by the lack of a structured framework to apply to the search. Causation is too often viewed as a black box subordinate to grand theories rather than as something to be picked apart and examined as a necessary part of the process of forming such theories. Counterfactuals offer a way to test those theories, and an aid in the creation of new, competing theories. Whether by taking “exception that prove the rule” cases and showing how easily they comply with a theory, or by showing how simple it would be to divorce the case from a theory it is being used to prove, counterfactuals question inevitability and find the definitive limits of theories.

Counterfactuals also offer a new way to integrate history and political science. The two disciplines are intertwined, but rarely explicitly so, leaving gaps that can threaten theory formation and use in political science analyses. Politics and power cannot be fully understood without understanding the contexts in which they are enacted and discussed. In breaking large events down to their component parts and identifying causal chains to modify, we learn about them in different ways than we would in a traditional political science setting. Understanding how and why people talk about politics and power – the *post facto* historiography that arises and how that historiography is used to perpetuate political ideas and power structures – expands and enriches the work that can be done.

## **B. Limitations and Future Work**

None of this is meant to suggest that counterfactuals are a replacement for existing methodologies, or even that they are applicable in every situation. The process of creating strictly delineated plausible counterfactuals that rest on changes to well-chosen turning points is still very much a discipline in progress. The tests I have used, both for establishing the plausibility of my alternate worlds and for examining the contingency of each turning point, were excellent guidelines for my purposes, though I did adapt several of them along the way. But counterfactuals have multiple uses, and different scholars can come up with different answers to the test questions even when they have the same goals in mind. A comprehensive list of tests that cover all eventualities is, I think, out of the question; the establishment of a standard set of base questions that researchers can then add to depending on their situations and goals – perhaps with secondary standardized sets for other common categories of problems that counterfactuals can be applied to – would aid in creating a flexible, rigorous framework with a wider range of applications. The development of such a modular system may have to wait until enough counterfactual studies have been done to identify the sub-cases that occur, but it is a worthy goal for future researchers that would aid in lending legitimacy to the counterfactual process.

There is also the question of what evidence to use in creating counterfactual narratives. One of the best ways to keep strictly within the parameters of a plausible alternate world is to only build those narratives using alternatives that were considered by actors at the time. But the documentary record to support those alternatives may be lacking or absent entirely, due to reasons of security or historiographical trends that have consigned certain documents to obscurity. In my own research for this project, I found that alternative plans were often not stated explicitly and in full, rather, pieced together from some primary source documents and

knowledge of the general policy trends of the time. Nor can *post facto* memoirs or oral histories by the participants be relied upon to fill the gaps in the cotemporal documentation. They are written and told with the benefit of hindsight and often in changed political and economic circumstances, occasionally contradicting their previous accounts or those of their fellow actors. As such, I made a conscious decision to limit my use of those sources, and in the case when I did so – George Kennan's account of his views on German policy in Chapter 2 – I did so because it added to what we knew of his thoughts and actions at the time while remaining consistent with them.

There is still much work to be done to standardize and solidify counterfactuals as an accepted way of doing political science. But this project has show that not only is such work entirely possible, it is incredibly rewarding.

### **III. IMPLICATIONS FOR COLD WAR STUDIES**

The preceding section illuminated some of the benefits that counterfactuals have for political science in general, but what has applying them to the cases of German and Korean division taught us about the Cold War specifically? Certainly the fact that the Cold War was a contingent and non-inevitable event is a controversial enough claim to some scholars, despite the overwhelming evidence. More specifically, however, it has serious implications for how the international system that emerged during the Cold War should be understood under theories of international relations such as realism and constructivism, and for how those theories should deal with similar systems in the future.

For nearly all political scientists, the Soviet-bloc-versus-Western-bloc system that arose

after World War II was a near-textbook example of a bipolar system. One notable exception is James McAllister, who argues – as part of a larger critique of Kenneth Waltz's neorealist framework – that the post-war system was in actuality *tripolar*, with Germany serving as the central balancing pole between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>140</sup> McAllister does not employ counterfactuals in his critique, rather choosing to focus solely on identifying direct contradictions between the events in Germany and the predictions made by Waltz's neorealist theory. McAllister's argument is well-constructed and well-articulated, but it is inherently limited by its straightforward approach. He finds contradictions and moves directly to a dismissal of the applicability of neorealist bipolarity to post-war American-Soviet interactions, leaving out answers to several of the most interesting questions, such as, how much did theoretical predictions and reality diverge? who was most responsible for that divergence, and how certain was their position at the time? Those are not usually questions that can be answered strictly by a traditional analysis – in fact, they will often not even be *asked* during a traditional analysis. Yet their answers give additional information without which any evaluation is incomplete.

Bipolarity, as is commonly used in Cold War discourse, is both descriptor and explanation of states' behavior: it “refers to the distribution of power among states after World War II; and, it is that peculiar distribution of power, [...] that accounts for both the antagonism that developed between the United States and the Soviet Union and the fact that that antagonism, though intense, did not lead to a major war”.<sup>141</sup> The dual usage of “bipolarity” to mean both a state of relations and a cause of a particular sort of relationship is a fraught one: “if the definition of bipolarity that is used to derive behavioral predictions is different from the definition that describes the

---

140 McAllister, *No Exit*, 5-15. Other explorations of whether the post-war system was truly bipolar include R. Harrison Wagner, “What Was Bipolarity?” in *International Organization* 47 (Winter 1993): 77-106 and Robert Jervis, *Systems Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

141 Wagner, “What Was Bipolarity?”, 77.

international system, then any predictions derived from the condition of bipolarity will be true only by accident”.<sup>142</sup> McAllister attempts to solve this problem by doing away with bipolarity altogether and presenting the post-war international system as a tripolar one where both American and Soviet beliefs that “Germany represented a potential third power whose defection or allegiance would determine the overall balance of power, as well as the closely related belief that a united Western Europe could eventually emerge as a third center of power, exerted a dominant influence on American foreign policy”.<sup>143</sup> This idea, while novel, does not actually resolve – and, in fact, perpetuates – the idea of system descriptors being used simultaneously as explanations or causes, as McAllister's only change to previous Cold War balance of power discussions is to substitute “tripolar” for “bipolar”. Similarly, while Wagner makes a convincing case for the need to better define what is meant by “bipolarity” in the Cold War discourse and makes some progress towards doing so, he too ends up defining his way out of needing to make any real conclusion by dismissing bipolarity as a distinguishing feature of the post-war system and arguing that, since “unlike the hegemonic wars that preceded it, World War II was fought in such a way that one of the defenders against the previous claimant to hegemony was placed in a near-hegemonic position itself [...] with Soviet troops in the middle of Europe,” the Cold War can be understood as a long stretch of deterrence by the United States against the Soviet Union in a traditional balance-of-power framework encompassing multiple actors.<sup>144</sup>

Both of these attempts to qualify the state of the post-war and Cold War international system rest on assumptions – stated and unstated – about the cause and start of the Cold War that are replicated in a large portion of the literature, as we saw in Chapter 1. The two biggest

---

142 Wagner, “What Was Bipolarity?” 78.

143 McAllister, *No Exit*, 11.

144 Wagner, “What Was Bipolarity?” 94, 105.

assumptions are that the Cold War started immediately – or almost immediately – after World War II and that the Cold War was a natural progression of relations rather than an event with direct and proximate causes. There are multiple problems with those assumptions, but the primary ones are that invoking balance-of-power theories as explanations for the American-Soviet relationship that developed after World War II give it an air of inevitability that is inaccurate, and that the bipolarity (or tripolarity) that emerged was beneficial as it removed questions as to which alliances would form between states.

The cases of Germany and Korea examined in this paper clearly demonstrate that the Cold War was not inevitable. The Cold War was a national consensus in both the United States and the Soviet Union that grew out of conflicts in occupied Germany and Korea and quickly expanded into the spheres of influence of those great powers to divide the world. The bipolar nature of the system was a result of differences over occupation policy – and, more generally, the nature and extent of the spheres of economic and political interest that the great powers should be allowed after World War II – and Germany and Korea, while important actors who exerted influence over their more powerful partners, were causes of the bipolar system, not a result. German and Korean leaders helped bring about the division of their countries, but could not have done so had the United States and the Soviet Union not come to view dividing those countries as in their best interests – a view that developed at different speeds within the two great powers and under the influence of multiple internal and external factors. Accepting the contingency of the Cold War, then, means accepting that the theoretical bipolar system may not be as stable as theorists have suggested: the Cold War stability took years to solidify, came at the cost of two countries' unity, and always and always rested on the assumption that neither Germany nor Korea

would reunify and choose a side in the global ideological conflict.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armstrong, Charles K. *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Baras, Victor. "Stalin's German Policy After Stalin." *Slavic Review* 37 (June 1978): 259-267.
- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. "The Strategy of War by Proxy." *Cooperation and Conflict* 19. 263-268.
- Baruch, Bernard. *Baruch: The Public Years*. New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1960.
- Bohlen, Charles. "Byrnes-Molotov Meeting, Monday, July 23, 1945, 10:30 a.m.: Bohlen Minutes." In Mee, *Meeting at Potsdam*, 191-192.
- Breslauer, George W. "Counterfactual Reasoning in Western Studies of Soviet Politics and Foreign Relations." In *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, 69-94. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Crockatt, Richard. "The Origins of the Cold War and the Problems of Synthesis: A Review of Recent Work." *Contemporary European History* 4 (November 1995): 383-392.
- Cumings, Bruce. *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1946-1947*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Cumings, Bruce and Kathryn Weathersby. "An Exchange on Korean War Origins" in *New Evidence on the Korean War*, edited by Kathryn Weathersby. Washington, D.C.: Cold War International History Project, 1995, 120-121.
- Eisenberg, Carolyn Woods. *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Graebner, Norman A. "Cold War Origins and the Continuing Debate." *The Journal of Conflict*

*Resolution 13* (March 1969): 123-132.

Goodrich, Leland M. *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956.

Gromyko, Andrei. "Statement by A. A. Gromyko at the Sitting of the Political Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, October 28, 1947". In *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)*, collected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R., 49-54. Moscow, 1948.

Gromyko, Andrei. "Speech by A. A. Gromyko at the Plenary Meeting of the Second Session of the United Nations General Assembly, November 13, 1947". In *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)*, 55-65.

Hart-Landsberg, Martin. *Korea: Division, Reunification, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998.

Kennan, George. "A Letter on Germany". *The New York Review of Books* 45 (December 1998): 19-21.

Kennan, George. *Memoirs, 1925-1950*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967.

Korea Daily Summary, 21 December 1950. Papers of Harry S. Truman, Staff Member and Office Files: National Security Council File; Central Intelligence Agency File, 1947-1953; Box 1; Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO.

Lebow, Richard Ned. *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

McAllister, James. *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

- Mee Jr., Charles L. *Meeting at Potsdam*. New York: M. Evans & Company, Inc., 1975.
- Mosely, Philip E. "Dismemberment of Germany: The Allied Negotiations from Yalta to Potsdam." *Foreign Affairs* 28 (April 1950): 487-498.
- Nettl, J.P. *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany, 1945-50*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Patterson, David S. "Recent Literature on Cold War Origins: An Essay Review." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 55 (Summer 1972): 320-329.
- Smith, Anthony D. "State-Making and Nation Building." In *States in History*, edited by John A. Hall, 228-263. Chichester: Blackwell Publishers, 1986.
- Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union. "TASS Statement on the Korean Question." In *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)*, 7-10.
- Towe, Philip. "The Strategy of War by Proxy." *The RUSI Journal* 126. 21-26.
- United Conference of Representatives of Northern and Southern Korea. "Message of the United Conference of Representatives of Northern and Southern Korea to the Governments of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. on the Withdrawal of Foreign Troops from Korea, April 23, 1948". In *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)*, 67-69.
- United States Department of State, editor. *Foreign Relations of the United States...*
- ...*The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945* Volume II.
  - ...*General: Political and Economic Matters, 1945* Volume II.
  - ...*The British Commonwealth, the Far East, 1945* Volume VI.
  - ...*The Far East, 1946* Volume VIII.
  - ...*Council of Foreign Ministers; Germany and Austria, 1947* Volume II.

...*Germany and Austria, 1948* Volume II.

Vyshinsky, Andrei. "Excerpt from a Speech by A. Y. Vyshinsky at the Plenary Meeting of the Second Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 23, 1947". In *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)*, 35-38.

Wagner, R. Harrison. "What Was Bipolarity?" *International Organization* 47 (Winter 1993): 77-106.

Weathersby, Kathryn. "New Russian Documents on the Korean War" in *New Evidence on the Korean War*, edited by Kathryn Weathersby. Washington, D.C.: Cold War International History Project, 1995, 30-35.

Zubok, Vladislav M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has its roots in Fall 2012, when I wrote a comparative analysis of the Soviet Union's influence on the reunification policies of East Germany and North Korea. Since then, it has gone through multiple different forms and been worked on in three countries and three states before ending up as this paper. Thanks and credit are due to the many, many people who supported me along the way.

Thanks to Professor Craig Murphy, who has been a clever and encouraging thesis advisor for the past nine months, who helped me turn vague ramblings on divided countries and the Cold War first into a researchable question and then into this final paper.

Thanks to Professor Katharine Moon, who supervised my original independent study and without whom I would never have fallen in love with comparative politics, diplomatic history, or academic writing.

Thanks to Jean Herbst and Randy Shull, who have been everything I could ever dream of having in mentors and more for the past three years, for putting up with me making *everything* about the Soviets even when I probably should have been paying more attention to computer science.

Thanks to the staff at the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, for their incredibly kind help to a first-time researcher – yes, even the security guard who didn't know what an iPod was.

Thanks to Jordan, for coming to Independence with me and for making it her goal to poke as many holes in my analysis of the situation in 1945-1953 Korea as she could. Chapter 3 is the better for it.

Thanks to the brilliant, wonderful girls of the Wellesley Mock Trial Team, especially my co-captains Allie, Mai Yer, and Sam, for their encouragement, reminders that life (however surprisingly) does exist outside of thesis, and laughter of the sort unique to bad case jokes at 3 in the morning in faraway hotel rooms.

Thanks to my parents, for not asking questions when I came home for winter break and promptly spent four weeks asking them to drive me to various coffee shops so I could write – even if that wasn't quite what they were expecting when they encouraged me to write a thesis.

Thanks to my sisters, Colette and Kira, for patiently listening to me explaining my work, offering advice – even if it was limited to “Okay but you should come see my pipefish” (Colette) or “What about Egyptian mummies?” (Kira) – and baking me desserts.