

A WEAK LINK IN THE CHAIN: THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE TRUMAN-
MACARTHUR CONTROVERSY DURING THE KOREAN WAR

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This work examines the actions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the first year of the Korean War. Officially created in 1947, the Joint Chiefs saw their first true test as an institution during the conflict. At various times, the members of the JCS failed to issue direct orders to their subordinate, resulting in a divide between the wishes of President Truman and General MacArthur over the conduct of the war. By analyzing the interaction between the Joint Chiefs and General Douglas MacArthur, the flaws of both the individual Chiefs as well as the organization as a whole become apparent. The tactical and strategic decisions faced by the JCS are framed within the three main stages of the Korean War.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On 10 April 1951, the President of the United States, Harry Truman, announced that, “in view of the specific responsibilities imposed upon me by the Constitution of the United States . . . I have decided that I must make a change of command in the Far East.”¹ With this announcement, President Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur of his command of United States and United Nation forces in Korea and the Far East. This event marked the culmination of months of disagreement between General MacArthur and the Truman Administration over the conduct of the war in Korea. The actual order from President Truman did not go directly to General MacArthur. Instead, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley, sent the message.² This line of communication exemplified the chain of command as it existed within the United States military at the time. The Joint Chiefs of Staff served as a conduit between President Truman and General MacArthur, the theater commander. In carrying out his command duties, General MacArthur reported directly to the JCS for direction. This work argues that during the Korean War the Joint Chiefs failed to fulfill their responsibilities within the chain of command by not establishing the proper authority over their subordinate. The Joint Chiefs never directly challenged General MacArthur’s repeated advocacy for an expansion of the conflict, which was not in accordance with the Truman Administration’s emerging policy of limited war. This breakdown of the chain of command resulted from a lack of individual decisiveness and group unity within the Joint Chiefs of Staff.³

¹ Statement by the President, 10 April 1951, George C. Marshall Papers, George C. Marshall Research Foundation, Lexington, VA.

² General Omar Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General’s Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 636-7. The order to relieve MacArthur remains controversial. Originally, Secretary of the Army Frank Pace was to inform MacArthur of his dismissal in person, however because of communications delays and the press hearing of the news, President Truman authorized General Bradley to transmit the order over Army wires.

³ Within this paper the terms Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Chiefs, and JCS will be used interchangeably.

This failure on the part of the Joint Chiefs occurred due to two main reasons. First, the role and responsibilities of the JCS remained unclear and ill-defined, particularly with regards to actual operations. This organizational defect resulted in several changes to the JCS in the decades following its creation. During the Korean War, the Joint Chiefs existed directly within the chain of command. Three decades later, the Joint Chiefs served solely in an advisory capacity, thus streamlining the line of communication between the president as commander-in-chief and the actual theater commander. Secondly, the individual members of the Joint Chiefs each held personal and professional beliefs regarding warfare, which did not always coincide with their interaction with General MacArthur. In an organization which required unanimous decision making, the end result for the JCS in Korea was often inactivity.

The actions, or inactions, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff can best be examined by dividing the Korean War into three distinct phases.⁴ During the first phase, as the United States worked to contain the situation in South Korea, the Truman Administration determined the level of commitment within Korea. The Joint Chiefs provided MacArthur with a series of objectives to meet and constraints to work within. For the most part, MacArthur complied with JCS directives with regards to his mission responsibilities. The second phase is marked by the Joint Chiefs exerting little to no control over the operations within Korea. This loss of authority occurred primarily in response to the success of the Inchon landing. It also partially resulted from the belief by several of the chiefs that they should not micromanage operations from Washington. In the final phase, the introduction of Chinese forces into Korea brought about a fundamental disagreement between MacArthur, the JCS, and also the entire Truman Administration over the

⁴ Traditionally, the Korean War is divided into four phases. The first phase involves the initial defense of South Korea. The second phase is marked by the U.N. troops moving to the offensive. The third phase encompasses the resumption of a defense after Chinese involvement. Finally, the static action and negotiations throughout the conclusion of the war represent the fourth phase.

scope and limitations of the war. MacArthur continually advocated policies which, in the eyes of leaders back in Washington, could potentially result in a third world war. The Joint Chiefs repeatedly neglected to restrain MacArthur and his requests. This phase ended with MacArthur's dismissal in April 1951.

Together with the president, the Joint Chiefs of Staff faced the prospect of entering into a military conflict without the ability to pursue complete victory. Even as U.S. forces touched ground in Korea, administration officials kept a close eye on the activities of the Soviet Union, as well as China. The overwhelming fear was that at any moment either power might step in, prompting a global war. In the new atomic age, political leaders, including Truman, thought this a frightening prospect. With this in mind, Truman decided that Korea was a war for limited objectives. This meant accepting an outcome short of all-out victory if a larger commitment threatened to precipitate another world war. After World War II, the idea of limited warfare received a mixed reception. Military leaders, troops, and even civilians found it difficult to accept that victory, if it came, would not include the total defeat previously inflicted upon America's enemies. However, limited warfare served as an extremely important concept in the decades following the Second World War.⁵

Throughout the first several months of the Korean War, the restrictions placed on the military appeared acceptable. However, the entry of China into the war in November 1950 created a schism between the political and military leaders of the United States. As one of the first major analysts of the Korean War, T.R. Fehrenbach maintains that General MacArthur challenged the traditional concept of civilian control over the military. According to Fehrenbach,

⁵ Adrian Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 127-130. An insightful look at the doctrine of limited warfare and its relationship to traditional American military ideas can be seen in Lewis's analysis of the Korean War, as well as the

although MacArthur did not intentionally attempt to subvert this constitutional principle, President Truman had no choice except to relieve him. MacArthur's repeated efforts to privately and publicly alter United States policy offered little alternative. According to Fehrenbach, "no soldier has that privilege."⁶

The fundamental policy disagreement between MacArthur and Truman centered on the direction of the war in Korea. Fehrenbach believes that the issue was one of limited versus total warfare. He maintains that MacArthur sought victory on the battlefield even at the cost of an enlarged war. MacArthur's view of warfare echoed the traditional American style as practiced by Presidents Wilson and Roosevelt. In contrast, Fehrenbach refers to Truman as being of a new mindset of "Great Power Americans." To men such as Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and even General Omar Bradley, operations in Korea would never be worth risking a new world war.⁷

Several other historians echo this interpretation of MacArthur's dismissal. In perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the event, John Spanier argues that MacArthur disagreed so vehemently with the policies of the Truman Administration that he posed a dangerous threat to the president's control over the military. Spanier believes that in the post-World War II era of nuclear weapons, limited warfare is the only rational method of dealing with international conflicts. Unable to accept these restrictions, MacArthur took his case public, creating the threat to the Truman's authority.⁸ Another example of this view is illustrated by historian Burton Kaufman in *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command*, who states that

Truman-MacArthur controversy as an argument between adherents of limited war (Truman) and those of more total warfare (MacArthur).

⁶ T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* (Washington: Brassey's, 1998), 280.

⁷ Ibid, 282.

⁸ John Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965), 2-4, 273-5. Spanier's work is valuable in that it was written with an eye towards ideas of warfare rather

MacArthur, “directly challenged the constitutional authority of the President as Commander-in-Chief.”⁹

A much harsher treatment of MacArthur can be seen in historian Michael Schaller’s *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General*. Schaller does not admire MacArthur, instead portraying him as an egocentric megalomaniac obsessed with his own power. Schaller maintains that in addition to MacArthur’s challenging of policy, he repeatedly argued in favor of the use of atomic weapons, a move that would surely have enlarged the conflict.¹⁰ Although there is scant evidence that MacArthur actually advocated the use of nuclear weapons, Schaller agrees with the majority of historians about the potential dangers to presidential authority and the fact that MacArthur committed acts of insubordination which ultimately gave cause for his dismissal.

Noted historian D. Clayton James presents a rebuttal to the critiques of MacArthur. Echoing Spanier, James argues that while MacArthur upstaged Truman on more than one occasion, his true failing was merely a differing opinion over strategic goals. However, James asserts that this disagreement, “had not posed a serious menace to civilian dominance over the military in America.”¹¹ MacArthur did not seek to wage war against China. Instead, he sought to carry out restricted operations against the Chinese in order to hinder their operations in Korea. MacArthur believed that such actions would not escalate into World War III. James goes on to

than a simple chronology of events. Echoing Clausewitz, Spanier maintains that limited warfare requires a “change in the traditional American attitude that war is a purely military instrument.”

⁹ Burton Kaufman, *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997), 89. Kaufman devotes an entire chapter to the MacArthur controversy. He believes that MacArthur directly disobeyed President Truman, who favored a limited action in Korea.

¹⁰ Michael Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). This assertion has been challenged by many historians, particularly D. Clayton James in *The Years of MacArthur*, vol. 3, *Triumph and Disaster 1945-1964* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 579-81.

¹¹ D. Clayton James with Anne Sharp Wells, *Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea, 1950-1953* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 213-4.

state that this explains why officials had such a difficult time reconciling themselves to dismissing MacArthur.¹²

Interestingly, few historical works analyze the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Korean conflict. The most comprehensive history of the JCS is the multi-volume *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs and National Policy*.¹³ As a reference work this series remains very useful, although it suffers from a lack of detailed analysis due to its large subject matter. Aside from the official history of the JCS, James is one of the few authors to actually mention the relationship between the Joint Chiefs and MacArthur. He contends that the JCS failed, “to communicate their doubts and anxieties, as well as their anger, to the theater commander.” Furthermore, James asserts that, “time after time, especially after the Red Chinese intervention, the Joint Chiefs retreated from the policy guidance and new directives they should have given MacArthur and should have demanded his obedience.”¹⁴ Regrettably, James fails to provide specific instances where this lack of dialogue occurred.

Like James, Spanier also mentions that clear communication is vitally important in a limited war setting. He notes that because “these limitations may make no sense militarily,” a nation’s political leaders must make sure to clearly and firmly direct the military. The alternative to such a course is escalation to a more devastating form of warfare. According to Spanier, MacArthur’s inability to understand the limitations imposed upon him led to a risk of nuclear war.¹⁵

¹² Ibid, 30-1, 197, 208. James believes that all of MacArthur’s acts of insubordination resulted from his ignoring of an order by President Truman to refrain from issuing any public statements without prior approval.

¹³ James Schnabel and Robert Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, vol. 3 parts 1 and 2, *The Korean War* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979).

¹⁴ James, *Refighting the Last War*, 216-7.

¹⁵ Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy*, 278-9.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff stood directly within this line of communication between President Truman and General MacArthur. Rarely did Truman speak personally to his Far Eastern commander. Instead, the role of the JCS was to transmit the opinions and wishes of the president to MacArthur as well as communicating MacArthur's situation up through the administration. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs were responsible for seeing that the Truman's policies were carried out. By allowing MacArthur to creatively interpret his orders at times, the JCS helped to create the situation which ultimately led to MacArthur's dismissal.

Although this study examines the Korean War, the failure of the Joint Chiefs does not exist in a vacuum. Various philosophies of command and control lead to the eventual organization of the JCS as it existed during Korea. This thesis begins by tracing the evolution of the general staff system from Prussia to the creation of the JCS during World War II. Throughout this period, the United States Army and Navy each developed its own doctrine regarding command. During the debate regarding the National Security Act, which would codify the JCS into law, these differences became even more pronounced. The end result was a compromise which led to a structurally ineffective JCS. However, because the JCS contained individuals who did not share a single mind, the backgrounds of these men are also presented in order to help explain some of the decisions they would make during the war.

The bulk of this work concerns the actions of the Joint Chiefs during the Korean War from the initial North Korean invasion in June 1950 to the relief of General Douglas MacArthur in April 1951. Although the war lasted for an additional two years, the period leading to the recall of MacArthur provides the clearest example of the failure of the Joint Chiefs. Thus, chapters three through five focus on the three initial phases of the Korean War; the initial defense of Korea, the Inchon landing and the resulting offensive, and finally, the Chinese intervention. In

the last chapter, the various amendments and changes to the JCS in the decades following the Korean War are analyzed and assessed.

The official records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provide the clearest method for determining the extent of communication between MacArthur and the JCS. The various teletypes and official memoranda outline a general course of the decision making process during the war. Additionally, several instances where a message was sent prior to receiving a response to an earlier message offer an insight into the often conflicting information transmitted to both MacArthur and the JCS. Equally valuable is the testimony given during the Congressional hearings of May 1951 during which each of the Joint Chiefs as well as General MacArthur defended their points of view.

Additionally, the private papers of the individual members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall, and General MacArthur allow historians to grasp the rationale behind many of the decisions made during the Korean War. Particularly useful are the various notes compiled in preparation for the Congressional hearings. Such documents provide a means for comparing what was said publicly versus what the Joint Chiefs may have actually believed.

Finally, the papers of Matthew Ridgway offer an outsider's perspective on certain events. General Ridgway served under both the JCS and General MacArthur. As deputy chief of staff, Ridgway witnessed firsthand the actions of the JCS in Washington with regards to events in Korea. Subsequently, as Eighth Army commander, he had the opportunity to deal directly with General MacArthur. A meticulous note-taker, Ridgway's papers often serve as a check against other sources.

By focusing on the dialogue and relationship between the Joint Chiefs and General MacArthur, the traditional interpretation of the Truman-MacArthur issue can be expanded to include the entire National Military Establishment. The desire for increased cooperation within the United States military resulted in the creation of the JCS. However, as this study will attempt to show, it often resulted in a slower decision making process and considerable confusion. Additionally, the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the emerging rift between a president and a general provides examples of personal conflict, as well as presenting reasons for subsequent reorganizations of the JCS.

CHAPTER 2

COMMAND THEORY AND THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF PRIOR TO THE KOREAN WAR

The National Security Act of 1947 officially created the organization known as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The JCS comprised part of the newly formed National Military Establishment headed by the secretary of defense. In addition, the act also established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Council (NSC), as well as the United States Air Force as an independent service branch. The intended purpose of the JCS was to provide military advice to the president and secretary of defense, as well as the preparation of strategic and logistical plans. Furthermore, the responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs included the establishment of unified and specified commands in locations deemed to be important to national security. As defined within the act, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consisted of the chief of staff of the Army (CSA), the chief of naval operations (CNO), and the chief of staff of the Air Force (CSAF). Additionally, the act also stipulated that the membership include the chief of staff to the commander-in-chief, "if there be one."¹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff as an organization contained many flaws which would not be apparent until the Korean War.

Throughout World War II, an unofficial JCS served as the principal military advisors to President Roosevelt and then Truman. The wartime JCS included the Army chief of staff, the chief of naval operations, the commanding general of the Army Air Corps, as well as the president's special advisor, the chief of staff to the commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy. Working directly with the British Chiefs of Staff, the JCS largely determined the direction and

¹ Alice Cole and others, eds., *The Department of Defense: Documents on Establishment and Organization 1944-1978* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense Historical Office, 1978), 45. The act additionally tasked the JCS to "review major material and personnel requirements of the military forces in accordance with strategic and logistic plans."

scope of the war effort. In a war spanning multiple continents and involving every branch of service operating jointly, the JCS performed an essential function. The official JCS historian, James F. Schnabel, notes that President Roosevelt “issued no formal statement or definition of duties and responsibilities . . . , owing primarily to a desire to allow them the necessary latitude and flexibility to carry out such activities as they might find necessary to satisfy the requirements of the war.”² Thus, the members of the Joint Chiefs during World War II largely improvised protocols they operated under.

The wartime JCS is often seen as a largely successful organization, however even though its members entertained overall control over their respective services, the JCS as a body exercised minimal control over the conduct of operations. As Paul Hammond notes, the Joint Chiefs provided very little direction except in a few instances.³ The largest contribution to the war effort by the JCS lay in the strategic direction they provided. Supporting President Roosevelt’s Europe first strategy, the members of the JCS kept the armed forces of the United States in line with this view. Additionally, the wartime Joint Chiefs maintained cordial working relationships with the British Combined Chiefs of Staff, thus contributing to a successful coalition effort.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff existed as a component of command and control. The experiences of World War II proved that warfare must now be conducted on all fronts, and included the operations of each service branch. This fact prompted the establishment of a coordinating entity embodied by the Joint Chiefs. Military staffs, however, were not new to

² James Schnabel, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, vol. 1, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1945-1947* (Washington D.C.: Office of Joint History; Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), 1.

³ Paul Hammond, *Organizing for Defense: The American Military Establishment in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 161. Hammond explains that even when the JCS did provide some measure of planning and direction, as in the case of operations in Europe starting in 1943, they still remained in a secondary position to the SHAEF command.

warfare. Command staffs emerged in Prussia in the late nineteenth century in response to increased difficulties of commanding forces in the field. The Prussian General Staff developed a decentralized method of command in order to provide more flexibility and direct command to troops. As Martin van Creveld notes, this decentralized approach to warfare emphasized strategic direction as opposed to tactical direction.⁴ Planning for war meant a top to bottom approach. The actual execution of warfare, according to the Prussian General Staff, operated in reverse.

During World War I, both the Germans and the British employed the staff system in order to command their respective armies. In contrast to the wars of the past century, improved communications such as the telephone allowed faster and more frequent exchanges between the front lines and command headquarters. As a result, the tendency developed for a staff to attempt to micromanage the battlefield, as the British did at the Battle of the Somme. Creveld compares the development of the British method of command, which employed a highly centralized approach to warfare, and the German system. Noting that the Germans attempted the “lowering of decision thresholds” whereas the British often saw soldiers as requiring strict guidance from those higher up in the decision making process.⁵

Although the German staff system often emphasized decentralization at the tactical level, it still remained responsible for strategy, and thus some operational input from the upper levels of command proved necessary. As events and actions resulted in the increase of what Clausewitz termed the fog of war, commanders at lower echelons remained bound by certain decisions made from above. This was necessary to ensure that forces remained coordinated with one another and

⁴ Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 144-145.

⁵ Ibid, 169-174; Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, The Western Front and the Emergence of Modern War 1900-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books Ltd., 2003). Travers provides a detailed analysis of British military thought and their command structure, particularly with regards to General Douglas Haig who commanded the British Army throughout the majority of World War I.

also kept their objective in mind in spite of the constant changing conditions on the battlefield.⁶

The need to issue strategic orders versus the desire for flexibility on the part of lower level commands resulted in a dilemma which the Germans, and future military staffs, found difficult to resolve.

In the United States, the War Department sought to establish a general staff in order to clarify the decision making process within the Army. In 1903, Secretary of War Elihu Root created the American General Staff, modeled very loosely upon the German concept. However, the Root reforms muddled the chain of command with regards to the chief of staff and the principle army commander in time of war. It was possible, and during World War I it occurred, that the commanding general held a rank superior to the chief of staff. Root intended the chief of staff to run the Army in all but operational matters.⁷ More than any other function, Root intended the Army chief of staff to be the principal military advisor to the secretary of war. After the war, Chief of Staff General John J. Pershing clarified this dilemma by consolidating the offices of chief of staff and overall commanding general. Pershing's reforms, although solidifying the chain of command within the Army, served also to further centralize the service.⁸

In contrast to the Army, the United States Navy reached the exact opposite answer regarding the question of the proper method of commanding forces. Despite technological advances in communications such as the wireless telegraph, a strong movement favoring a decentralized approach to command soon developed within the Navy. These proponents argued that doctrine and clearly communicated plans and intentions proved far more important in naval

⁶ Crevelld, *Command in War*, 182-3. Crevelld notes that at times the German armies "were allowed too much freedom, since at one point (23 March) they were all found advancing in divergent directions with no attempt being made to echelon them behind each other and coordinate their blows."

⁷ Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 12-22. Hammond notes that the "German origins . . . were not copied with any great care." Root apparently took the basic concept of the staff without truly understanding its relationship within the German government.

warfare than detailed sets of instructions constantly communicated from commanders far removed from battle.⁹ Within the Navy Department, the secretary of the navy handled all matters regarding procurement and administration, while the chief of naval operations dealt with, naturally, operational issues.¹⁰

This clash between command theories dominated the debates concerning the proposed National Security Act and the functioning of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Army and its supporters favored a plan which created a single chief of staff who maintained authority over all branches of the military. Keeping with traditional beliefs, the Army plan sought to centralize the military under a unified authority in order to simplify future planning and execution. Beneath this chief of staff, the Army proposed a Joint Chiefs of Staff represented by members of each service. This JCS, in contrast to the one which existed during World War II, was to be subordinate to the supreme chief of staff. As Amy Zegart notes, behind the Army's proposal lay "its philosophy of unified command."¹¹

The Navy opposed the Army plan for the JCS based on several grounds. First, decentralized command authority had, since the early twentieth century, become almost dogmatic within naval leadership. A single U.S. chief of staff threatened to become a meddling micromanager in both times of war and peace. To opponents of a strong JCS, the

⁸ Ibid, 47-8. The Army General Staff involved itself with planning, managerial, and administrative duties. With Pershing's reforms, it now also incorporated operations into its list of responsibilities.

⁹ Michael Palmer, *Command at Sea: Naval Command and Control Since the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 251-8. Palmer quotes William Halsey in 1933 as stating "The commander-in-chief must convey his intentions to his subordinates through a plan or plans. . . . These plans assign tasks to the subordinates. Discretion is left to the subordinates in executing these tasks. The controlling thought of the subordinate must be, will my action support the plan," 254; Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 49-84.

¹⁰ Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 49-84, 132-158.

¹¹ Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 111-3; Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 213-5. Interestingly, General J. Lawton Collins drafted the Army's proposed JCS plan. Collins would be the Army chief of staff during the Korean War.

very thought of this countered established naval doctrine. Naval officials believed that the JCS should be organized as it had been during World War II.

The primary point of contention from the Navy's side with regards to the JCS was the role of the proposed United States chief of staff. The Navy claimed that such a position threatened the civilian control of the military by giving one individual, other than the president, authority over the entire armed forces. In testimony before the Senate, Admiral Ernest King referred to such a position as a potential "man on horseback."¹² Naval officials used such pronouncements to play on the fears of civilians and those within the government.

The unification of command under a single position did not simply threaten naval tradition of decentralized leadership. Many within the upper echelons of the Navy believed such an arrangement threatened the service itself. A report prepared by the Navy claimed that a chief of staff would undoubtedly tend to favor one branch of service at the expense of the remaining branches. It is not difficult to see that the Navy feared the predominance of ground forces and their leadership in such an arrangement.¹³

As far as the actual organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Navy leaders urged that it function exactly as it had during World War II. During the war, the JCS reached decisions unanimously. Although this often allowed for a full discussion of differing points of view, such a procedure often resulted in a prolonged decision making process.¹⁴ Under the Army's proposal,

¹² Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 114. King referred to the potential for a person with such authority to become a dictator whose military power and popularity endangered the civilian government.

¹³ *Ibid*, 115.

¹⁴ Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 170-1; Grace Hayes, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982). Hayes argues that the JCS functioned remarkably well during the war with regards to the Pacific Theater. However, she maintains that the role of the JCS was largely relegated to strategic planning, leaving much of the operational details up to the theater commanders. Hayes singles out CNO Admiral King as having the greatest influence in the Pacific. Ironically, she also states that, "The one who came closest to Admiral King in his basic view that the Japanese should be kept under constant pressure was not a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff but the Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, General MacArthur," 725-6.

the JCS votes would be decided by majority. Such a process concerned naval officials who believed that the Army and newly established Air Force would in all likelihood simply outvote the Navy two to one.¹⁵

Based upon the Navy Department's objections, both public and private, the final draft of the National Security Act of 1947 represented a compromise that supported the Navy's position more so than the Army's, especially with regards to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Under the final draft, as seen earlier, the JCS consisted of the three service chiefs and a potential fourth member, a chief of staff to the president. The act established the functions of the Joint Chiefs, but did not specify procedural requirements for their functioning. Additionally, although the act allowed for a chief of staff to the president it did not mandate the position, nor did it endow the chief of staff any authority over the JCS. Decision making within the Joint Chiefs would be reached as it had been during World War II, through deliberation and unanimity.¹⁶

In sum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established in 1947 in theory served several purposes. First, they acted as the principle military advisors to the president and the secretary of defense. Additionally, the National Security Act authorized the JCS to prepare strategic and logistic plans, establish unified commands, and provide joint training polices.¹⁷ The JCS as a body was expected to perform their advisory duties towards the president while the individual chiefs would be responsible for administering their respective services. At times, the various service chiefs found it difficult to properly distinguish between their joint and individual roles.¹⁸

¹⁵ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 115. The Navy was principally concerned with budgetary processes, especially with regards to plans for newly designed aircraft carriers.

¹⁶ Cole, *The Department of Defense, 1944-1978*, 45-6; Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 226-9; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 125-133.

¹⁷ Cole, *The Department of Defense, 1944-1978*, 45. Kenneth Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 2, 1947-1949 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), 1-8.

¹⁸ Phillip Meilinger, *Hoyt S. Vandenberg: The Life of a General* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 144.

Between 1947 and 1949, limitations in the National Military Establishment as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff appeared principally due to issues of budget and service roles. This period also demonstrated the difficulty that the Joint Chiefs experienced in trying to reach agreements on certain issues. The budgetary crisis of 1948 and the battle over naval aviation in 1949 revealed that service parochialism remained rampant within the JCS. With each branch concerned over its own interests rather than joint responsibilities, the Joint Chiefs deadlocked on far more issues than they agreed. The most striking example of such impasses, the so-called “Revolt of the Admirals” in 1949, revealed the need for some sort of reform within the JCS.¹⁹

An amendment to the National Security Act in 1949 hoped to address the weaknesses of the original legislation. It contained several important changes to the 1947 version. First, the National Military Establishment was renamed the Department of Defense and granted executive level status. Second, it enlarged and strengthened the powers of the secretary of defense. Finally, the amendment established the position of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. While in office, the chairman took “precedence over all other officers of the armed forces: PROVIDED, That the Chairman shall not exercise military command over the Joint Chiefs of Staff or over any of the military services.”²⁰ The chairman existed as a mediator and a conduit between the JCS and the secretary of defense and the president. He had no vote, but did provide the agenda for JCS meetings, meaning that he chose which issues the JCS dealt with on a daily basis.

In terms of command and control, the Joint Chiefs of Staff existed within the United States operational chain of command. With the 1949 amendment, the line of authority ran from the president to the secretary of defense through the service secretaries to the individual chiefs.

¹⁹ Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, Vol. 2, 175-189, 311-53. Jeffrey Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation* (Washington D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1994), Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 244-47.

²⁰ Cole, *The Department of Defense, 1944-1978*, 84-95.

However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff as an organization reported directly to the president and the secretary of defense, leaving the service secretaries out of the equation at times. Additionally, the JCS as a whole was responsible for establishing unified and specified commands within theaters deemed important to national security.²¹

The JCS intended these unified commands to simplify operations by establishing a single commander to oversee operations within a specific area, such as the commander-in-chief Far East Forces (CINCFE) or the commander-in-chief European Forces (CINCEUR). The specified commands such as the Strategic Air Command (SAC) dealt primarily with specific roles rather than areas of responsibility.²² In order to simplify command arrangements, the JCS employed a system of executive agents to communicate and issue orders to the unified commands. A memorandum dated 1948 describes such a system:

The JCS member of the service having primary responsibility for a function shall be the agent of the JCS to present to that body the requirements for and plans for the employment of all forces to carry out the function. He shall also be responsible for presenting to the JCS for final decision any disagreements within the field of his primary responsibility which has not been resolved.²³

During the Korean War, Army chief of staff General J. Lawton Collins served as the executive agent for the Joint Chiefs of Staff due to the fact that the Army was the primary operational service.

²¹ Ibid, 94.

²² Gordon Lederman, *Reorganizing the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 44-5.

²³ Cole, *The Department of Defense, 1944-1978*, 287-8. The memorandum was part of the Key West Agreement, which helped to delineate the primary as well as secondary functions of each service. The agreement went a long way to mollifying much of the antagonism between the Navy and the other services; Lederman, *Reorganizing the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 121.

By 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been solidified by law for the purpose of directing the nation's military forces. The individual members of the JCS all possessed a substantial amount of both command and staff experience. Not only did each chief serve extensively in World War II, but each one was also involved in some way with the unification process which led to the establishment of the Department of Defense. Any serious study of the wartime efforts of the JCS must also take into account the individual personalities and proclivities of the men who administered the nation's armed forces. The chief of staff of the Army in 1950 was General J. Lawton Collins. Collins' distinguished career in the United States Army began with his graduation from the United States Military Academy in 1917. Upon graduation, Collins requested a position within the Infantry branch, although his unit failed to deploy to Europe during the First World War. Collins did manage to serve as part of the brief occupation forces after the armistice in 1919. After the war, Collins spent time as both a student, then an instructor at the Army's various schools such as the Military Academy and the Infantry School at Fort Benning in Georgia.²⁴

Collins' next assignment saw him stationed in the Philippines where he traveled extensively throughout Asia. Following this, Collins attended the Army War College in Washington D.C. During this period, events in Europe deteriorated and military planners recognized the possibility of a new war. Officials began reorganizing the Army and reassigning officers to units in preparation for a conflict. Collins, hoped for a regimental command, but instead settled for an assignment as Chief of Staff VII Corps.²⁵

After the United States entry into World War II, the Army transferred Collins to the Hawaiian Department as its Chief of Staff. Charged with helping to improve the defenses at

²⁴ General J. Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 6-57.

Pearl Harbor, Collins again proved his skills as an officer as well as an administrator. However, for all his success, he still sought an infantry command. He finally got his chance when in 1942 he was promoted to major general and assigned to command the 25th Infantry Division. The 25th fought in operations at Guadalcanal where Collins earned not only a reputation as a fine combat commander, but also his nickname of “Lightning.”²⁶

Collins’ next assignment during the war proved to be his most successful. As Commanding General of VII Corps, Collins participated in the Normandy invasion, continuing operations in Europe, as well as the Battle of the Bulge. Collins again distinguished himself, but also developed a reputation as one of the finest corps commanders within the Army.²⁷ After the war, Collins again accepted a staff assignment as chief of staff, Army Ground Forces. In this position, Collins helped to draft the Army service unification plan which became known as the “Collins Plan.” Collins served as deputy chief of staff of the Army under General Dwight Eisenhower and then General Omar Bradley. In 1949, General Collins succeeded Bradley as chief of staff United States Army.²⁸

The chief of naval operations in 1950 was Admiral Forrest Sherman.²⁹ The newest member of the JCS when the Korean War erupted, Sherman served as a naval aviator and then commanded a carrier during the early stages of World War II.³⁰ During the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Sherman commanded Task Force 38.3 as part of the Third Fleet.³¹ Sherman then accepted an appointment as deputy chief of staff to Admiral Chester Nimitz. In this role, Admiral Sherman

²⁵ Ibid, 86-118.

²⁶ Ibid, 135, 157.

²⁷ Ibid, 198-297.

²⁸ Ibid, 333-7, 344, 347.

²⁹ No biography exists on Admiral Forrest Sherman. The sketch presented here is based on material culled from a variety of secondary sources.

³⁰ Lawrence Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington: Indiana State University Press, 1989), 56-7.

acted as the principle liaison between Nimitz, the commander-in-chief Pacific Fleet, and General Douglas MacArthur, the supreme commander of Allied Forces in the Southwest Pacific Area. Sherman communicated quite frequently with MacArthur during this period. In fact, in his memoirs, MacArthur refers to Sherman as, “an old associate of the Pacific War.”³²

At the conclusion of the war, Sherman became the deputy chief of naval operations under Admiral Nimitz. In this position, Sherman worked with Army Air Corps General Lauris Norstad to draft a compromise between the two branches. This agreement would eventually help lead to the National Security Act of 1947.³³ After the “Revolt of the Admirals” in 1949, President Truman relieved CNO Admiral Louis Denfeld in part because of his role in the controversy. Sherman was named the new CNO in part because of his reluctance to participate in the Navy’s case.³⁴ As far as his importance to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley called Sherman, “a gifted strategist.”³⁵

Representing the Air Force on the JCS was General Hoyt Vandenberg. Like Collins, Vandenberg also graduated from the United States Military Academy. Unlike Collins, however, Vandenberg did not distinguish himself academically and often found himself in danger of being forced to leave the academy. Upon graduation in 1923, Vandenberg’s academic standing did not allow him a cavalry assignment which he coveted. Instead, he was forced to choose between Infantry and the newly created Air Service.³⁶ Vandenberg soon emerged as an accomplished pilot and officer, leading to his admittance to the Army War College in 1938. Upon graduation,

³¹ Major General Courtney Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 172.

³² General Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 350

³³ Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 221; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 67-8;

³⁴ Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 56-7; Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals*; Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* Vol. 2, 319-51; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 513.

³⁵ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 534, 647.

³⁶ Meilinger, *Hoyt S. Vandenberg*, 10

the Army assigned him to the Air Corps Plans Division under Lieutenant Colonel Carl Spaatz. Vandenberg excelled at administrative duties as much as he did as a pilot.³⁷

In 1944, Vandenberg took command of the Ninth Air Force. Charged with tactical air cover for General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group operating in Europe, Vandenberg coordinated closely with the Army. The Ninth Air Force established complete control of the air over Europe during Vandenberg's command, earning him the respect of not only Army leaders, but also senior Air Force officials.³⁸ At the conclusion of World War II, Vandenberg returned to the Air Staff.

Vandenberg's second stint on the Air Staff witnessed his emergence as a proponent of the doctrine of strategic air power. Although he served as a fighter pilot for the majority of his career and also headed a tactical command, Vandenberg soon espoused the benefits of strategic bombing. He soon authored a memorandum detailing the benefits of long range bombers and of the use of atomic weapons. Vandenberg also called for increased intelligence capabilities in order to fully utilize the weapons in America's air arsenal.³⁹

His advocacy of intelligence gathering soon presented Vandenberg with an opportunity to head the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). During his tenure as director of central intelligence (DCI), the government soon began debating the details of the pending National Security Act. Vandenberg pressed for a stronger intelligence agency with more centralized power.⁴⁰

With the passage of the National Security Act in 1947, the United States Air Force became an independent entity. Its first chief of staff was General Carl Spaatz, Vandenberg's old

³⁷ Ibid, 19-28.

³⁸ Ibid, 50-61.

³⁹ Ibid, 62-6.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 66-78.

commanding officer. In 1948, Vandenberg replaced his old mentor as Air Force chief of staff. During his first year on duty, the Berlin crisis forced President Truman and the JCS to come up with a solution to the Soviet blockade. Despite initial reluctance, General Vandenberg successfully administered the Air Force's airlift of supplies into Berlin.⁴¹

The final member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1950, General Omar Bradley, served as the first official chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was the oldest and most senior member of the chiefs. Like his colleagues, Bradley served in a variety of staff and combat roles throughout his military career which prepared him for his duties on the JCS.

A graduate of the famed 1915 class of the United States Military Academy, Bradley's early career mirrored most young Army officers of the day. Upon his graduation, Bradley accepted a position within an infantry regiment. However, rather than serving in Europe during World War I, Bradley's unit garrisoned the United States-Mexico border. After the armistice agreement, Bradley attended, and later taught at, various military schools including a stint as mathematics instructor at West Point. By 1934, Bradley found himself as an instructor in the tactical department at the Military Academy. He was now instructing future officers how to lead as well as fight.⁴²

With the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939, the United States Army prepared itself for a potential conflict. The new Army chief of staff, General George Marshall, assigned several promising officers to various assignments throughout the department. Bradley moved from his teaching duties to a job in Marshall's staff. As an assistant secretariat to the chief of

⁴¹ Ibid, 91-102.

⁴² Bradley, *A General's Life*, 30-77.

staff, Bradley not only made a favorable impression on Marshall, he saw firsthand the daily goings on of the chief of staff of the Army.⁴³

Prior to the United States entry into World War II, Bradley gained even more experience as an administrator when he commanded the Infantry School at Fort Benning. In 1942, Bradley commanded the 82nd Infantry Division and the 28th National Guard Division. Bradley reunited with a former West Point classmate when General Dwight Eisenhower, commanding the U.S. forces in North Africa, picked him as his personal representative.⁴⁴ During World War II, Bradley rapidly rose through the ranks to assume a variety of combat commands. Succeeding General George Patton as commander of II Corps in North Africa and Sicily, Bradley gained valuable experience as did the rest of the U.S. Army. He then headed 1st Army during Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, in 1944. His most prestigious role, however, was as commanding general of the 12th Army Group as it drove across the European continent.⁴⁵

Despite his schooling and experience, contemporaries as well as historians offer a mixed assessment of Bradley's combat and command skills. General George Patton labeled Bradley a "man of great mediocrity," as well as a timid leader.⁴⁶ In his analysis of the Normandy invasion, historian Adrian Lewis labels Bradley as an average general who too often refused to take risks. Questioning Bradley's tactical expertise, Lewis also addresses the fact that, "Bradley did not assert himself up the chain of command. He was too willing to accept, too willing to be convinced."⁴⁷ Bradley was a very by-the-book officer, who often lacked the creativity to think

⁴³ Ibid, 83-6.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 94-112, 131.

⁴⁵ Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 37; Bradley, *A General's Life*; Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002). Atkinson traces the development of the Army and Navy during the first years of the War. Atkinson maintains that during this period the military gained valuable experience which it would put to use when the invasion of Europe finally occurred in 1944.

⁴⁶ Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers: 1940-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 398-9, 588.

⁴⁷ Adrian Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 160-3.

beyond the dictates of his training. Although this did not always make an effective combat officer, it did permit Bradley to rise up through the administrative ranks of the Army.

After the war, Bradley managed the Department of Veteran's Affairs. He successfully enlarged the VA during his tenure and offered increased services to veterans such as educational opportunities and expanded health benefits. Bradley took the position, on the advice of Eisenhower, in part to increase his standing with President Truman. It was Eisenhower's belief that Bradley would succeed him as Army chief of staff.⁴⁸ Bradley would ascend to this position in 1948 upon Eisenhower's retirement. In 1949, with the amendment to the National Security Act, Bradley assumed the role of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴⁹

The members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff all served long and distinguished careers in the armed forces prior to their appointments. The unique combination of administrative and combat experience provided the organization with four service chiefs who possessed the requisite experience needed to run the United States military in both peace and war. In particular, Generals Bradley and Vandenberg, as well as Admiral Sherman, each demonstrated the ability to successfully conduct joint and combined operations.

However, as an organization, the JCS contained many deficiencies which appeared soon after the passage of the National Security Act in 1947. The seeming inability of the JCS to conduct business in a timely manner hindered its effectiveness. Additionally, interservice rivalries prohibited the JCS from ever achieving its intended purpose, namely the unity of command of the United States military. The JCS that emerged in 1947 was a weak body by design, primarily due to the Navy's influence. Furthermore, the organization of the JCS further complicated the imprecise command structure of the military. Since the chiefs held the dual

⁴⁸ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 451.

responsibilities of both principal military advisors and heads of their respective services, they were often unable to discriminate between the two similar but distinct functions. Additionally, the JCS system further complicated the relationship between the service secretary and the service chief. The establishment in 1949 of a chairman within the JCS did little to increase the effectiveness of the organization. In sum, the convoluted structure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff exhibited several flaws prior to the Korean War. Once the war came, the JCS revealed even more weaknesses, thus hindering the exact purpose for which it was created.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 504-5. Bradley writes that the secretary of defense offered Eisenhower the job first, but “Ike flatly turned it down.” The second choice was Bradley, who after some initial hesitation accepted.

CHAPTER 3

THE INITIAL DEFENSE OF SOUTH KOREA

The first phase of the Korean War began with the invasion of South Korea by the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) on 25 June 1950. The North Korean attack forced the President and the Joint Chiefs to consider whether or not to intervene militarily. Within days following the invasion, the Truman Administration ordered first air and naval forces, then finally ground troops to stem the invasion. The United States entered the Korean situation with a clear immediate outcome, namely the repulsion of the North Korean attack. However, the rapidity of events left little time to ponder subsequent events. During this initial period, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, based upon recommendations from General Douglas MacArthur, escalated the level of commitment of U.S. forces in Korea.

At the time of the invasion, the United States policy towards South Korea remained unclear at best. Several months prior to the invasion of South Korea, Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced that the United States recognized a defensive perimeter in the Far East. However, this line of defense excluded South Korea.¹ Acheson made this announcement based upon the belief that the United States possessed limited resources which must be utilized efficiently.

Prior to Acheson's speech, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to downgrade the U.S. presence in South Korea. The United States withdrew its forces from Korea on 30 June 1949. The U.S. military's shortage of resources in the post World War II era was the main reason for withdrawing the troops from Korea. The United States government felt it could not afford to maintain a dominating presence throughout the entire globe. As a result, the decision was made

to focus on the defense of major industrial centers, such as those in Western Europe and Japan. Additionally, the JCS thought that the U.S. presence in Korea represented a liability rather than a benefit, especially from a logistical point of view. In the eyes of military leaders, the Korea peninsula offered no measurable advantages in the event of war with the Soviet Union.²

Although the Joint Chiefs, the Departments of State and Defense, and General MacArthur all concurred in the decision to withdraw troops, the effects of such a move remained unclear. In his memoirs, General Bradley states that he, the JCS, and MacArthur all agreed that South Korea held little value to the U.S. Additionally, he claims that “we [the JCS and MacArthur] shared the view that . . . in the event of ‘trouble,’ the ROK Army could handle North Korea.”³ According to Bradley, American military leaders felt secure in removing their forces from South Korea.

However, General Collins presents a slightly different explanation of the prevailing view. He claims that MacArthur did not believe that the South Korean forces would be adequate to the task of defending their nation. Collins quotes MacArthur as recommending that “‘in the event of any serious threat to the security of Korea, strategic and military considerations will force abandonment of any pretense of military support.’”⁴ Thus, as early as 1949, General MacArthur recognized that the forces available to him within the Far East Command were inadequate for any task other than the defense of Japan. In his estimation, if the U.S. could not commit a sufficient level of manpower to the defense of Korea, then all forces should be pulled out. It would be a waste of both men and materials to attempt to halt an invasion of South Korea with the amount of troops stationed there in 1949.

¹ Kaufman, *The Korean War*, 15. Kaufman notes that because of this speech, Acheson has been blamed for encouraging the invasion. However, Kaufman, and most recent historians argue that Acheson was simply putting into words the established policy of President Truman.

² Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, Vol. 2, 515-6.

³ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 529.

⁴ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 28.

Collins also claims that Bradley held misgivings regarding the decision to abandon South Korea. He claims that Bradley believed a U.S. withdrawal would encourage an attack from North Korea. He presented his views to the JCS on 20 June 1949, asking for a reconsideration of policy. As chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Bradley could present matters for consideration. However, under the 1949 National Security Act, he had no voting privileges. Collins does not state the individual views of the JCS, only that they decided against revisiting the matter with the National Security Council.⁵

It is interesting that Bradley makes no mention of his motion to reconsider the troop withdrawal. It is possible that Collins' memoirs are mistaken and Bradley did not bring the issue up. However, since a vote occurred, it is apparent that one of the chiefs did even if Bradley did not. More likely, Bradley did not want to create a controversy in his memoirs by pointing out a difference in opinion among the chiefs.

After the North Korean attack, officials within the United States government did not know what to make of events. Most believed that the Soviet Union instigated the invasion. Others, including JCS chairman General Omar Bradley, thought that the action was a prelude to a Chinese offensive to regain Taiwan.⁶ These concerns can be seen in the first orders given to General MacArthur after the initial invasion by North Korea. The JCS directed him not only to use U.S. air and naval forces in support of Republic of Korea (ROK) forces south of the 38th parallel, but also to move the U.S. Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. This section of the

⁵ Ibid, 29-30.

⁶ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 534; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969), 405. In fact, although the myth of the communist monolith is today doubted, Acheson's wording in his memoirs makes it clear that in 1969, he still believed in the Soviet's direct complicity in the North Korean invasion.

instructions stated that the fleet was there to “prevent any attack on Formosa, or any sea or air offensives from Formosa against mainland of China.”⁷

The Joint Chiefs as well as officials within the State Department all believed that the North Korean invasion occurred at the behest of the Soviet Union. The prevailing attitude in Washington believed that all of the various Communist movements across the globe were merely puppets of the Soviet Union. This included both China and North Korea. Despite the fact that clashes between North and South Korean troops occurred with some regularity, the JCS failed to recognize or even consider the possibility that North Korea planned and initiated the attack of their own accord. Despite the presence of U.S troops in Korea for the past several years, the concept of Korean nationalism seemed to escape Washington planners. In truth, while both Soviet and Chinese leaders were aware of Kim Il-Sung’s intention to unify Korea, they were also hesitant to commit any substantial amount of assistance other than materials.⁸

In his memoirs, Bradley claims that at a meeting with the president and his cabinet on 25 June 1950, the issue of utilizing ground troops in support of ROK troops was brought up. He states that both he and Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins thought this unwise. Neither man wanted to involve U.S. troops on the ground in Asia.⁹ The administration also hoped that the South Korean Forces could fend off the invasion without direct support from U.S. ground troops. In fact, in a memorandum prepared from notes at the meeting, Chief of Naval

⁷ JCS to CINCAL, etc. 84499, 27 June 1950, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Record Group 218, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

⁸ Chen Jian’s *China’s Road to the Korea War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Chen highlights the relative passivity that Moscow attempted to maintain as Kim Il-Sung presented his plans to Moscow and Beijing.

⁹ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 536.

Operations Admiral Forrest Sherman, maintained that any action in Korea was “predicated on cover of evacuation.”¹⁰

General Collins’ recollection of these events differs from what others have reported. Collins notes that he advised U.S. ground troops might prove necessary “if the army of the Republic of Korea (ROK) was badly hurt.” He recommended that a survey team be sent to assess the situation on Korea.¹¹ Most likely, Collins realized that air and naval power alone would not stop the North Korean attack. Either the U.S. recognized the possibility of sending ground forces into Korea, or it accepted the potential defeat of South Korea. However, the majority of Truman’s chief advisors, including Collins, believed that the U.S. must respond to the North Korean invasion in some fashion. Still operating under the assumption that the Soviets instigated the attack, officials feared that success in Korea might embolden the Soviets to conduct similar operations in other parts of the world.¹²

This discussion indicates the feelings of the JCS members at the dawn of the Korean War. It also shows the speed of the decision making process in Washington as officials attempted to react to the changing situation. They viewed South Korea as not of enough military importance to risk the use of ground troops. By authorizing air and naval support, the JCS hoped in vain that the doctrine of strategic bombing would prove sufficient to halt the North Korean advance. This early version of limited warfare failed, prompting the President and the Joint Chiefs to issue the first order authorizing ground troops. On 29 June, the JCS cabled MacArthur with new orders. They gave him authorization to conduct naval and air strikes into North Korea, as well as the employment of “limited army forces.” The JCS intended the sole purpose of these

¹⁰ Admiral Forrest Sherman Memorandum to JCS, 20 April 1951, Office Files of Forrest P. Sherman, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

¹¹ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 13-4.

ground troops to be the protection of the port and air strips in the Pusan area. In addition, the order warned MacArthur that any actions taken should stay clear of “the frontiers of Manchuria or the Soviet Union.”¹³ Clearly, the JCS still intended to limit the U.S. response in Korea as much as possible. To MacArthur, the decision to employ ground troops demonstrated the willingness of the United States to fight against communism.¹⁴

In his analysis of United States Cold War policies, *Strategies of Containment*, historian John Lewis Gaddis frames the decision to intervene in Korea as one of risk versus credibility. The risk of course was that any U.S. action in Korea would precipitate a larger war with the Soviets or China. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs belief that Korea was not the place to conduct such a war if it came about factored into the initial hesitancy. Their fears also explain the graduated response to the North Korean invasion, beginning with attempts to provide logistical assistance to South Korea, to the use of air and naval power to augment the ROK, to finally introducing ground troops. The deciding factor in the administration’s decision boiled down to the issue of U.S. credibility. If the South Korea were allowed to fall, it would convey the message that the United States was not willing to repulse Communist aggression. In short, such a course would paint the United States as appeasers.¹⁵

Perhaps the most important events during this initial phase of the war occurred during the final days of June and early July 1950. To begin with, the JCS acquiesced to demands by

¹² Department of the Army (DA) to CINCFE 84486, 27 June 1950, Papers of General Douglas MacArthur, The MacArthur Memorial, Norfolk, VA.

¹³ JCS to CINCFE 84681, 29 June 1950, Records of the JCS.

¹⁴ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 334-5. MacArthur writes, “thus the United States accepted Communism’s challenge to combat in Korea. The risk that the Soviet or Chinese Communists might enter the war was clearly understood and defiantly accepted.”

¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 107-10; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 535. Bradley notes that he also saw the issue as one of aggression and appeasement. At the 25 June meeting, he asserted that “we have to draw the line somewhere,” and Korea ‘offered as good an occasion for action in drawing the line as anywhere else;” Dean Acheson, *The Korean War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 20-1. Acheson, one of

MacArthur for more troops. After a discussion with MacArthur via teleconference, General Collins authorized the use of a Regimental Combat Team (RCT) and promised to request the two divisions that MacArthur desired. Later that day, President Truman also approved a naval blockade of North Korea, thus escalating the commitment in Korea even further.¹⁶ More significant was the order to MacArthur removing the restrictions on his use of Army Forces, “subject only to the requirements for the safety of Japan.”¹⁷ Washington officials considered Korea of secondary importance when compared to the vital industrial centers in Japan. From the JCS and even Truman’s point of view what mattered most was to maintain a strong presence in Japan in order to prevent it from falling under Communist control.¹⁸

For MacArthur, the JCS directive amounted to a blank check on his employment of forces in Korea. The JCS left it to his discretion as to what constituted an appropriate force to maintain Japanese security. His original mission remained to halt the attack and “clear South Korea of North Korean Forces.”¹⁹ MacArthur remained adamant that this could not be accomplished without the use of non-ROK ground troops.

The decision to move ground troops into Korea created further concerns for the Joint Chiefs. The possibility that the invasion represented a prelude to further actions by the Soviets forced the JCS to consider recommending a full mobilization, including calling up the reserves and the National Guard. Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army General Matthew Ridgway argued that the United States should recognize the threat posed by the situation in Korea. Ridgway, not a man to shy from argument, presented his opinions to both Generals Collins and Bradley on

the initial proponents of intervening in Korea, clearly saw the issue as one of prestige. He viewed the threat of American response as deterrence against further aggression.

¹⁶ General J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 20-3; Admiral Sherman to JCS, 20 April 1951, Files of Forrest Sherman.

¹⁷ JCS to CINCFE 84718, 30 June 1950, Records of the JCS. The memo ends by telling MacArthur that the troop strength necessary for Japan would be left to his own judgment.

¹⁸ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 525; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 56-61.

several occasions during this period.²⁰ Retired General Dwight D. Eisenhower also urged for a mobilization effort to begin immediately. Ridgway, who discussed the situation with Eisenhower, noted that he:

Stated in most vigorous language and with great emphasis, his feeling that we ought at once to begin partial mobilization; perhaps reinforce our European forces by a division or two; publicly increase our security measures throughout the country; at once remove the limitation placed on MacArthur to operate south of the 38th parallel; and even to consider the use of one or two atomic bombs in the Korean area.²¹

Eisenhower drafted a letter to Bradley urging him to adopt these measures. Bradley notes that “Ike believed that the Pentagon was not moving fast enough, that we did not grasp the gravity of the situation.”²²

In truth, the Joint Chiefs did grasp the importance of the circumstances. They attempted to avoid full mobilization in order to keep the hostilities confined to Korea. In his work *The Forgotten War*, Clay Blair argues that the JCS believed that a mobilization of the National Guard would weaken the ability of the United States to respond to a crisis elsewhere in the world. Additionally, the Guard troops would consume large amounts of money and other resources in order to train and equip them. As a result of budget cuts in previous years the armed forces, and in particular the Army, did not possess the necessary resources to meet the requirements of a full

¹⁹ JCS to CINCFE 84681, 29 June 1950, Records of the JCS.

²⁰ General Matthew Ridgway Memorandum, 26 June 1950, Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

²¹ Ridgway, Memorandum, 28 June 1950, Matthew Ridgway Papers. Additionally, Ridgway noted that Eisenhower expressed some reluctance at the appointment of MacArthur to command operations in Korea. In addition to his age, Eisenhower saw MacArthur as “‘an untouchable’ whose actions you cannot predict, and who will himself decide what information he wants Washington to have and what he will withhold.”

²² Bradley, *A General's Life*, 537-8.

mobilization effort.²³ More importantly, they felt that the only way to keep the conflict confined to Korea was to limit the number of troops available for operations.

Over the following days, MacArthur made repeated requests for additional troops. The JCS on 6 July sent a message to MacArthur informing him that for the present he would receive no additional units. The JCS explained that they could spare no additional troops from other locations. Shortfalls in both manpower and shipping capabilities prevented them from meeting MacArthur's requests in time. In one memo, the JCS assured MacArthur that his desires, "are receiving active sympathetic consideration." An interesting line in this correspondence also reveals the thinking of the JCS and that of the Truman Administration as a whole at this juncture. A JCS request for troop estimates from MacArthur in order to "clear South Korea of North Korean forces" possibly indicates that the administration continued to consider this a limited action aimed at renewing the status quo.²⁴

As late as 27 July, Ridgway again brought up the issue of activating the National Guard to Collins. Ridgway's notes indicate that Collins "was not interested in asking for it at this time." Additionally, Collins believed that the situation in Korea would be cleared up before such units could be combat ready.²⁵ The JCS remained hopeful that the situation in Korea could be settled in mere months. When the JCS did eventually begin to mobilize the entire immediate reserve forces in the United States, they did so to guard against a possible Chinese attack against Taiwan.²⁶

²³ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 121-2.

²⁴ JCS to CINCFE 85058, 6 July 1950, Records of the JCS. In keeping with his previous orders, MacArthur continued to shift troops from Japan as he transferred the 1st Cavalry division to Korea. Bradley, *A General's Life*, 543. MacArthur's previous orders indicated that his mission in Korea authorized him to conduct necessary operations in North Korea. Again, the JCS left these decisions to his own judgment. JCS to CINCFE 84681, 29 June 1950, Records of the JCS. Sherman, Memo to JCS, 20 April 1951, Files of Forrest Sherman.

²⁵ Ridgway, Memorandum, 27 July 1950, Matthew Ridgway Papers.

²⁶ Walter Poole, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs and National Policy Volume IV, 1950-1952* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980), 38-44.

The actions of the Joint Chiefs at this point no doubt sent mixed messages to General MacArthur. At no time did the JCS inform MacArthur that he would never receive additional troops. Instead, they told him it was impossible at the moment to augment his command due to shipping limitations, lack of approval from higher up in the administration, and a need to maintain troop strength in other areas. They stated that they sympathized with the situation in Korea and would continue to “make every effort to insure that you [MacArthur] receive the support which is required.”²⁷ To paraphrase a famous statement of President Truman, the Joint Chiefs passed the buck with regards to MacArthur’s requests. Rather than reiterate the intended limitations of the U.S. commitment, they allowed MacArthur to make repeated requests for increased troop levels. However, the JCS used the Korean intervention to appeal for an increase in the overall size of the military. While they felt that MacArthur had sufficient forces to complete his limited mission in Korea, the Joint Chiefs desired to augment the fledgling NATO forces. MacArthur states that he viewed this as yet another instance of the Far East being placed low on the nation’s list of priorities, even as troops directly engaged enemy forces in Korea.²⁸

By the middle of July 1950, the United States, operating under a United Nations resolution, committed itself to securing the independence of South Korea. During the initial days of the invasion, when it became apparent that the Republic of Korean Army could not stand up to the North Korean attack, President Truman authorized the use of ground troops. Both the president and the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained that the goal of U.S. involvement was to simply force the retreat of the North Korean forces out of South Korea. With the meager resources available to the Far East Command, all efforts aimed at simply ensuring an effective defense without forcing a complete evacuation of the Korean peninsula. The directives of the

²⁷ JCS to CINCFE 85058, 6 July 1950, Records of the JCS.

president and the JCS to General MacArthur illustrate these goals, as well as the lack of any intended follow-up. Initially, the United States government intended the Korean action to be a limited war with an extremely limited objective.

The issue of Taiwan and a possible Chinese attack created another instance of confusion between MacArthur, the JCS, and President Truman. General MacArthur performed dual functions during the Korean War. First, as commander-in-chief Far East Forces (CINCFE) he was charged with protecting occupied Japan and Taiwan. By 8 July, his other role was commander-in-chief of United Nations Forces (CINCUNF). The JCS made clear to MacArthur that his unified command was only to carry out his operations in Korea, but not his duties towards Taiwan.²⁹ However, as events unfolded, it is highly doubtful that MacArthur could distinguish between his role as CINCFE and that of CINCUNF, especially when he saw the issues as interdependent.

The JCS members themselves remained preoccupied with Taiwan for much of July, even as MacArthur remained adamant that he would need all available troops for operations in Korea. Intelligence reports to the JCS indicated the increasing likelihood of a Chinese invasion. As a result, they ordered the Seventh Fleet back to Taiwan after completing air strikes in Korea. The Joint Chiefs also recommended to MacArthur that the Nationalist government be advised to undertake mining operations in the Taiwan Straits and attack troop concentrations on the mainland.³⁰ Furthermore, the JCS informed MacArthur that he was free to make a

²⁸ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 337. This was not a new phenomenon for MacArthur. During World War II he continually argued for increased resources in the Pacific versus the European theater.

²⁹ JCS to CINCFE 85370, 10 July 1950, Records of the JCS.

³⁰ JCS to CINCFE 87061, 25 July 1950, Records of the JCS; JCS TO CINCFE 87160, 26 July 1950, Records of the JCS; JCS to CINCFE 87401, 28 July 1950, Records of the JCS.

reconnaissance trip to Taiwan as, “the responsibility is yours.” He was also authorized to launch reconnaissance flights along the coast of China to assess the imminence of an attack.³¹

While in Taiwan, MacArthur made several statements calling for increased cooperation between the United States and Taiwan. To some, including Truman, he appeared to be challenging the policy of the U.S. with respect to Taiwan. On the other hand, the last several messages from the JCS seemed to encourage him by emphasizing the increased likelihood of an attack from the mainland on Taiwan.³²

MacArthur’s visit caused a furious uproar in Washington, especially within the State Department. His actions also put the JCS on the defensive. MacArthur’s seeming dismissal of the administration’s wishes especially angered Secretary of State Dean Acheson. The secretary believed that the JCS interpreted Truman’s orders incorrectly as a shift in policy towards Taiwan. According to Acheson the U.S. was committed to a neutral position in China, meaning that it would not tolerate an attack from, or against, the mainland. The last thing either Truman or Acheson wanted was for war to break out in China.³³ Unfortunately, the recent activity by the Chinese Forces along the coast heightened fears of aggression, resulting in the JCS message of 28 July, which even in Bradley’s view amounted to a “war warning.”³⁴ This message mentioned allowing the Nationalists to conduct attacks against the mainland. It is entirely possible that the JCS believed that Truman’s insistence on thwarting a Communist invasion of Taiwan implied a

³¹ JCS to CINCFE 87492, 29 July 1950, Records of the JCS; JCS to CINCFE 87501, 30 July 1950, Records of the JCS.

³² Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 549. Bradley recalls that the JCS would have preferred that MacArthur either delay his trip to Taiwan or send a representative to survey the situation. However, in an almost apologetic manner, he still affirms MacArthur’s responsibilities towards Taiwan.

³³ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 422.

³⁴ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 548-9. This message indicated estimations of Chinese capabilities and intentions, as well as recommendations to the secretary of defense. These courses of action included permitting the Nationalists to conduct attacks along the shore and mining operations. JCS to CINCFE 87401, 28 July 1950, Records of the JCS.

desire for increased support to Nationalist President Chiang Kai-shek. Even if it did not, the tone of their dispatches to MacArthur indicated this to be the case.

In response to criticism in Washington, the JCS attempted to clarify their position regarding Taiwan. They restated their earlier recommendation that Chiang be allowed greater freedom of action towards the mainland. In addition, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson proposed that MacArthur be given the latitude to permit Nationalist forces to attack Chinese Forces massing along the coast. The president and the State Department turned down these proposals and ordered that MacArthur be reminded of his actual responsibilities.³⁵ The JCS did so, noting that his directive of 28 June obligated him to protect the stalemate between Taiwan and China. Furthermore, Secretary Johnson cabled MacArthur to emphasize that “the most vital national interest requires that no action of ours precipitate general war or give excuse to others to do so.”³⁶ Johnson’s message, although the final word on the matter, directly contradicted the earlier teletype from the JCS.

The issue of Taiwan represents yet another instance of the often fluctuating policy in the Far East. Prior to the Korean invasion, U.S. policy intended to maintain the status quo between Taiwan and China. However, the question over the utilization of Nationalist troops in Korea represents yet another instance of inconsistent directives and policy. As early as 30 June, the JCS cabled MacArthur that an offer of assistance from Chiang Kai-shek would be refused, and that any further offers should not be answered by MacArthur, but referred to the State Department.³⁷ In his memoirs, MacArthur states that he felt any use of Nationalist forces in the United Nations coalition would weaken the island’s defenses. President Truman, on the other hand sincerely

³⁵ Schnabel, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, vol. 3, part 1, 511-12.

³⁶ JCS to CINCFE 87783, 2 August 1950, Records of the JCS; Secretary of Defense to CINCFE 88014, 4 August 1950, Records of the JCS.

³⁷ JCS to CINCFE 84737, 30 June 1950, Records of the JCS.

considered utilizing Chiang's forces. General Ridgway recalls that after a military briefing on 30 June, President Truman inquired why the U.S. had not made use of Nationalist troops.³⁸ The President would modify his views, so that by the time of the JCS directive authorizing attacks along the Chinese coast, Truman sought to keep Taiwan out of the conflict. Most likely, Dean Acheson or even the Joint Chiefs influenced the President's views. Acheson felt that any use of Nationalist forces threatened to bring China, and possibly even the Soviet Union, into the conflict.³⁹ Truman evidently agreed with his advisors.

MacArthur's message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) on 26 August also heightened tensions between the General and Washington. In his statement, MacArthur seemed to challenge the President's policies directly calling the abandonment of Taiwan to the Communists nothing short of appeasement.⁴⁰ This defense of an open-ended commitment to Taiwan prompted Truman to consider relieving MacArthur. The president did not share his views with the JCS, although he did inform them of the letter at a meeting on 26 August.⁴¹ Later, several administration officials mention that MacArthur should have been relieved right then, however this is the gift of hindsight. Both Bradley and Acheson remark that the option did not occur to them at the time because the offence did not appear to warrant that particular course of

³⁸ Ridgway, Memorandum, 30 June 1950, Matthew Ridgway Papers; Harry Truman, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 185. In his diary dated 30 June, Truman notes that "we probably should use Chinese ground forces." Truman concluded his entry by urging caution not to start a general war in Asia.

³⁹ Condit, *The Test of War, 1950-1953*, 53.

⁴⁰ Schanbel, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Vol. III*, 514-15. The VFW Message can be found in full in Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Military Situation in the Far East: Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., May 3-14, 1951, 3477-3480.

⁴¹ Harry Truman, *Memoirs: Volume II, Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), 354-6. Sherman, Memo to JCS, 20 April 1950, Files of Forrest Sherman. Sherman writes that he returned from Tokyo on 25 August, and briefed the president on 26 August. In his memoirs, Collins claims that he does not remember this meeting, and that perhaps he was on his way back from Tokyo. Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 275. Interestingly, Bradley's memoirs also mention this meeting and the fact that Collins and Sherman had just returned from their trip to the Far East. Bradley, *A General's Life*, 551.

action.⁴² Truman ordered MacArthur to retract his message, however the situation worsened when *The New York Times* published the full text of MacArthur's letter on 29 August.

From the end of June until September, the United States government, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, strove to develop a new Far East policy in light of rapidly changing situations. As they did so, they relied heavily on reports and recommendations from the theater commander General Douglas MacArthur. Prior to the North Korean invasion, the United States seemed ready to abandon South Korea with the exception of limited material assistance. However, due to the speed of the North Korean advance, the overwhelming defeat of the ROK force, as well as the danger of further Communist aggression, the Truman Administration reevaluated its position in Korea.

The Joint Chiefs did not welcome a ground war in Asia, particularly in Korea. They felt the terrain unsuitable for the mobile operations currently employed by U.S. forces. Also, the chiefs believed that the commitment of a large number of forces in Korea threatened the defense of other, more valuable regions, such as Europe. They attempted to utilize both air and naval assets in the hopes that they would be sufficient to stop the invasion. When it did not, they reluctantly recommended the introduction of ground troops. As operations in Korea escalated, the Joint Chiefs opposed any dramatic increase in the number of troops available to the Far East Command. They believed that they could confine the fighting to Korea by limiting the scope of operations there. Representing the conflict in Korea as illustrative of the world situation, the JCS sought an increase in the size and strength of the military. They did so, not with an eye to Korea, but with the defense of Europe in mind. The Joint Chiefs contemplated every proposed action by questioning the probable Soviet response. Even when the issue of Chinese intervention became a

⁴² Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 424; Bradley, *A General's Life*, 551.

possibility, such as the involvement of Taiwanese troops, Soviet involvement remained the primary concern.

The Joint Chiefs also dealt with a theater commander in General Douglas MacArthur, who did not share their world view. Throughout World War II and the following years, MacArthur consistently warned against ignoring Asia in favor of Europe. Additionally, he believed, as most soldiers often do, that a nation went to war to win and that all measures and resources should be employed to ensure victory. If the Joint Chiefs also thought this way, they did not publicly say so. In Korea, they saw the potential for the situation to erupt into a larger conflict with China which they were not interested in waging.

As the United States responded to the situation in Korea, these differences of opinion between the Joint Chiefs and others within the military did not create an immediate controversy. This was due to the necessity of a rapid response and a stabilization of the situation before any further action could be taken. The North Korean invasion needed to be halted before it could be repulsed. However, as soon as General MacArthur initiated his defense of South Korea, he began drawing up plans for a breakout and envelopment of the North Koreans.

CHAPTER 4

THE INCHON OPERATION AND THE CROSSING OF THE 38TH PARALLEL

The second major phase of the Korean War began with the amphibious landing at Inchon, code-named Operation Chromite, which resulted in U.N. forces taking the offensive in Korea. In the aftermath of the Inchon landing, the goal of operations in Korea changed from simply forcing the North Korean army back across the 38th parallel to the destruction of the war-making capabilities of North Korea and the possible unification of the country under a single government. Additionally, General MacArthur's overwhelming success at Inchon resulted in the JCS allowing MacArthur even more latitude in his follow-up operations. Even when the Joint Chiefs questioned MacArthur's judgment, they refused to take a firm stance with their subordinate.

In a cable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 July, MacArthur described his plans for a breakout from the Pusan perimeter. He proposed an amphibious landing near the port of Inchon while simultaneously driving his forces north from Pusan. MacArthur intended to cut off the North Korean Army's supply lines and envelop their forces, cutting off their escape route and destroying the enemy forces.¹ The planned breakout, as well as the hazardous situation along the Pusan defense perimeter, accounted for MacArthur's frequent emphatic requests for additional troops.

The Joint Chiefs regarded MacArthur's proposal with skepticism from the outset. Admiral Sherman's notes reveal that as early as 10 August, he recommended that the JCS not support the proposed operation, although they did agree to augment his forces.² From his limited

¹ CINCFE to JCS 58473, 23 July 1950, Papers of General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur set a tentative date for the operation as mid to late September. The actual operation began on 15 September 1950.

² Sherman, Memo to JCS, 20 April 1950, Files of Forrest Sherman. The JCS thought the venture too risky, considering the tidal conditions near the port.

notes, it appears that Sherman objected specifically to the amphibious portion of MacArthur's plan. In any case, the defense of the Pusan perimeter forced MacArthur to place his plans on hold until he had more troops available.

As the situation along the Pusan perimeter stabilized, MacArthur resumed planning for Operation Chromite. His target date was 15 September, when the tide would be high enough to permit a landing. MacArthur also hoped to begin his assault early enough to prepare for the coming winter season in Korea. He believed that a successful counter-offensive would defeat the enemy before the harsh cold set in.³ The Joint Chiefs still doubted the feasibility of MacArthur's proposed counter-offensive.

Hoping to acquire more information regarding MacArthur's impending plans, General Collins and Admiral Sherman traveled to Japan. They either hoped to convince MacArthur to abandon his plans for an amphibious landing at Inchon, or sought a more detailed explanation of his intentions.⁴ Although he outlined his basic proposal in the July teletype, the JCS received very little further details. Collins and Sherman met with MacArthur in Tokyo on 21 August where he restated his case for the landing. Two days later, in a private meeting, Sherman reiterated to MacArthur his worries about the proposed plan. According to Sherman, he told MacArthur that, "Inchon was a dangerous enterprise if any resistance developed. He [MacArthur] agreed it could be done only if there were none."⁵ Later that afternoon, Sherman, Collins, and the entire planning staff met with MacArthur, who presented an eloquent defense of

³ Major General Edward Almond to General Walton Walker, Strategic Concept for the Destruction of the North Korean Armies in the Field, 5 August 1950, Papers of General MacArthur. This memo outlined the details and extent of the Inchon operation with the exception of the actual date, the specific location, and the targeted line of advance. Almond notes that "the date of the initiation of this effort has not been fixed, but it must be sufficiently early to permit the consummation of the plan before the arrival of cold weather in Korea, usually about mid-November."

⁴ Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, 81; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 120. Collins writes that MacArthur "was very skeptical about the security of the information he furnished Washington."

⁵ Sherman, Memo to JCS, 20 April 1950, Files of Forrest Sherman.

his plan. Most accounts of a meeting on the following morning mention the reservations still held by all involved. Historians often argue that the location of Inchon as the landing site precluded wider acceptance of the plan.⁶ However, MacArthur appears to have convinced Sherman at some point, although it is possible that Sherman simply wanted a reason to make the Navy more relevant to the war effort.⁷

Collins notes that the visit served to reinforce MacArthur's desire to proceed with the Inchon operation. Additionally, both Collins and Sherman left Japan with a clearer understanding of the General's intentions.⁸ More importantly, this visit buttressed MacArthur's belief that he could push forward his proposals through eloquence and force of will. MacArthur did in fact believe that the visit meant to dissuade his plans. Additionally, he thought that General Bradley specifically opposed the operation due to his dislike of amphibious operations and that President Truman did not wish to utilize Marine forces as major combat troops.⁹

The attitude of the Joint Chiefs with respect to Chromite illustrates the dilemma they faced when dealing with a wartime situation. Upon their return to Washington, Collins and Sherman briefed the remaining chiefs about the operation. Even after the conference with MacArthur, Collins and Sherman held reservations regarding the chances of success. Their fears were most likely shared by the remaining members of the JCS.

The Chromite debate reveals just what the Joint Chiefs believed their role within the military establishment and the chain of command to be. Had they truly felt the chances of

⁶ Lewis, *The American Culture of War*, 98.

⁷ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 126; D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume III, Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 470-1; Dennis Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 47-9. Collins mentions that General O.P. Smith, commander of the 1st Marine Division favored an alternate landing site at Posung-Myon, 30 miles south of Inchon. Interestingly enough, it is Admiral James Doyle the commander of Amphibious Group I who appears to have swayed Sherman into tacitly approving of MacArthur's plan. Sherman quotes Doyle as telling him that there was "no better place than Inchon within twenty miles." Sherman, Memo to JCS, 20 April 1950, Files of Forrest Sherman.

⁸ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 127.

success to be slim, the JCS could have stopped the operation entirely either by ordering MacArthur not to proceed or by withholding materials and troops necessary for such an endeavor. They did neither of these. Collins states that, “a theater Commander is always given broad leeway by the JCS in planning and conducting operations.”¹⁰ Collins, as well as the other chiefs saw themselves not as commanders, but as advisors to the president. In reality, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were intended to be both. They expressed their concerns to President Truman, although apparently not very persuasively. Truman enthusiastically supported MacArthur’s plan, against the wishes of his military advisors.¹¹ This shift from planning to advising duties indicates just how different the Joint Chiefs of Staff were from previous military staff systems. The Prussian and German General Staffs directly involved themselves in operational planning in times of war. Additionally, even the United States Army General Staff included an Operations Plans Division that helped to formulate the methods of achieving both strategic and tactical goals.¹²

With the President’s consent, the JCS approved MacArthur’s basic plan although the members requested further information on the defenses at Inchon and the feasibility of additional landing sites. Still expressing their hesitations about the operation, the Joint Chiefs informed MacArthur of the President’s authorization. Their message to MacArthur qualified the approval for Chromite by stating:

After reviewing the information brought back by General Collins and Admiral Sherman we concur in making preparations and executing a turning movement by amphibious forces on the west coast of Korea either at Inchon in the event that enemy defenses in the

⁹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 346-7.

¹⁰ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 120.

¹¹ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 547.

¹² Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 120.

vicinity of Inchon prove ineffective or at a favorable beach south of Inchon if one can be located. We further concur in preparation, if desired by CINCFE, for an envelopment by amphibious forces in the vicinity of Kunsan. We understand that alternative plans are being prepared in order best to exploit the situation as it develops.

We desire such information as becomes available with respect to conditions in the possible objective areas and timely information as to your intentions and plans for offensive operation.¹³

This additional information was not received by the JCS until 8 September, following a second request the previous day from the JCS for operational plans.¹⁴ In this telegram, MacArthur restated his plans for landing and enveloping the enemy once his two forces linked up. He went on to further claim that “there are no material changes under contemplation in the operation as planned and reported to you.” He concluded by stating that the initial “preparations are proceeding according to schedule.”¹⁵ By the time the JCS briefed the president on the plan, the operation was well beyond the initial stages, with only days left before its launch. Bradley claims that when meeting with the president, the JCS recommended their approval based on the fact that it was too late to disapprove the operation.¹⁶ In light of the apparent risks associated with the operation the light-handed approach by the JCS towards MacArthur remains questionable, especially considering that the target date of 15 September had been established well in advance.

The success at Inchon led to the near decimation of the North Korean Army and, more importantly, fostered reluctance on the part of the JCS to question MacArthur’s future

¹³ JCS to CINCFE 89960, 28 August 1950, Records of the JCS.

¹⁴ JCS to CINCFE 90908, 7 September 1950, Records of the JCS; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 127-8.

¹⁵ CINCFE to JCS 62423, 8 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

¹⁶ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 555-6.

decisions.¹⁷ The Joint Chiefs increasingly retreated from their command role over the unified commands, in particular the Far East Command, and relegated themselves to their duties as military advisors to the president. In perhaps the most striking example, MacArthur decided to attempt a second amphibious assault on the east coast of Korea at Wonsan. In doing so, MacArthur pulled troops away from the offensive, resulting in a delay of several days. He also formulated a plan whereby the unit making the landing, the X Corps, would be kept independent of the advancing Eighth Army. In his work, James characterizes the Wonsan plan as “unwise as Chromite was brilliant.”¹⁸ Collins mentions his evaluation of the plan, which was unfavorable, but states that such decisions were “the prerogative of the commander.” Bradley commented, “Had a major at the Command and General Staff School turned in this solution to the problem, he would have been laughed out of the classroom.”¹⁹ Apparently no thought was ever seriously considered to order MacArthur to consolidate his command even though, according to Bradley, the JCS shared reservations regarding the operation.

The details of the Wonsan operation illustrate the larger dilemma that the Joint Chiefs faced with regards to their role and responsibilities. MacArthur intended to keep the commands separate so that he could better control continued operations as his forces advanced northwards. He claimed that the Taebaek mountain range precluded effective communications between the two, thus justifying the division. Additionally, personal enmity between Eighth Army commander General Walton Walker, and the X Corps commander, General Edward Almond,

¹⁷ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 141-2. Bradley claims that although questioning MacArthur’s tactical plans would be seen as “carping,” the JCS did not become more involved because “field operations were still the responsibility of the theater commander.” Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 568. Based on the enormity of the success and publicity surrounding Inchon, Collins’ view seems to have the most merit. Considering the political factors constantly referred to by the JCS in regards to Korea, the chiefs should have had no qualms directing MacArthur whenever they felt it was appropriate.

¹⁸ James with Wells, *Refighting the Last War*, 176-8. Ironically, during the time it took the amphibious force to withdraw and sail around the Korean coast a group of South Korean troops advanced overland and took Wonsan, before the landing craft arrived.

added to the reasoning for maintaining two separate forces.²⁰ None of the members of the JCS approved of his organization of Eighth Army and X Corps. Bradley opposed it vehemently, claiming it unwise and illogical. Collins testified before Congress that he opposed MacArthur's plan. In a handwritten memo assessing MacArthur's mistakes in Korea, Admiral Sherman cites the "use of X Corps . . . through Inchon – organization. Lack of logistic readiness in VIII Army."²¹

If the members of the JCS believed MacArthur's plan to be so unsound, they did nothing about it. Although the original Joint Chiefs of Staff began during a period of active warfare, the JCS as it existed in 1950 had been created during peacetime. Obsessed with budgetary disputes and interservice quarrels, the command responsibilities of the JCS went largely ignored. When asked what the powers of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were, General Bradley quoted the legislation and stated:

All of this, you see, pertains to the preparation for war.

Now, after any fighting starts we are working under the arrangement or under the requirement that any directives to a field commander, that is fighting a war, will be cleared by the Secretary of Defense; and if there are political implications, by the State Department, and then final approval by the President, before they are sent to the field commander.

So, to that extent we prepare the directives for the military operations.²²

¹⁹ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 155-163; Bradley, *A General's Life*, 568.

²⁰ Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, 125-7; Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 229.

²¹ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 567-8; Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Military Situation in the Far East: Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., May 3-14, 1951, 1251-2; Sherman, Memorandum, Undated, Files of Forest Sherman.

²² Congress, *The Military Situation in the Far East*, 905.

Clearly, Bradley saw differences between what the JCS could do during peacetime and what they could do during a war. The National Security Act, however, made no such distinctions.

General Collins' testimony before the Senate indicates that not all of the chiefs shared Bradley's reservations:

Senator Fulbright. So, is it fair to say that although you thought it justified in the beginning, that certainly you did not approve of the continued division of the commands?

General Collins. Well, I would say that I, as an individual, would have done it differently; but as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, we did not direct that General MacArthur combine the two, under one command.

We could have done it.

Senator Fulbright. Did you suggest that he do it?

General Collins. Yes, sir; but we had the right, it would have been within our province to have directed him to do it.

Senator Fulbright. I understand.

General Collins. We did not do so.²³

Collins then proceeded to explain the reluctance of the Joint Chiefs to interfere with the prerogative of a field commander. He never said that they could not do so, but simply argued that they trusted the judgment of the man at the scene. Writing years later, Bradley apparently changed his mind as to the responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs. Expressing his lament regarding the Wonsan operation, Bradley writes, "If only we had cabled: CANCEL WONSAN, SEND X CORPS IN HOT PURSUIT. CONSOLIDATE X CORPS AND ITS SUPPORTING TACTICAL AIR INTO EIGHTH ARMY."²⁴ For whatever reason, no such order to MacArthur was ever sent.

²³ Ibid, 1251-2.

²⁴ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 568.

This particular view of the JCS as simply an advisory board did not permeate throughout the entire organization. General Matthew Ridgway, the deputy chief of staff for operations, expressed his unease over the conduct of the war in Korea on several occasions. His diary notes that on 15 August he called a meeting where he discussed “the leadership, organization and planning in Korea.” Ridgway felt that as the main service branch in Korea, the Army would be held accountable for the conduct of the war. Additionally, he believed that “the ultimate responsibility would devolve upon the Joint Chiefs.” From his notes, it appears that Ridgway’s biggest concern dealt with the organization and command of the United States Eighth Army. He notes that Collins finally agreed with his point of view and decided to make a personal visit to Asia to discuss MacArthur’s plans.²⁵ This ended up being the trip Collins and Sherman took to Japan where they met with MacArthur in late August.

Ridgway seemed to have a far different idea of the scope of responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff than the service chiefs did themselves. That same day he met with Secretary of the Army Frank Pace where discussed his reservations not about MacArthur, but rather Eighth Army commander General Walton Walker. He believed Walker exhibited a “lack of force, acceptance of a mediocre staff, and an unsound Base organization.” Pace suggested Ridgway meet with MacArthur and outline his anxieties. Ridgway however did not believe this to be his responsibility, but rather MacArthur’s superiors, namely the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His notes:

I expressed the thought that there were two things involved. The first was the proper discharge by the JCS of its responsibility for reviewing MacARTHUR’s operational plans.

²⁵ Ridgway, 15 August 1950, Matthew Ridgway Papers. Ridgway’s notes intimate Collins agreed to make the trip reluctantly.

No one but the JCS could discharge this responsibility. The second was the responsibility COLLINS had as Army C/S for the Army's performance in KOREA.²⁶

Ridgway clearly thought that MacArthur's authority over his command was not all encompassing. He saw the Joint Chiefs of Staff as MacArthur's direct superior, capable of intervening when and if they deemed it necessary. Ridgway also realized that the chief of staff of a service ultimately had responsibility over the conduct of that service in wartime. In Ridgway's mind, they were not simply advisors.

The mystique of Inchon and MacArthur himself seemed to lull the JCS into inaction. They even attempted publicly to mute reports of their opposition to Chromite. To the counter a press release issued after the invasion which stated, "Sources close to General MacArthur said both Collins and Sherman opposed the landing at Inchon," the JCS messaged MacArthur that:

In reply to queries as to press reports that they had opposed the planned landing at Inchon and suggested landings farther south, Gen Collins and Adm [sic] Sherman stated that in accordance with the practice developed during World War II they, as reps of JCS, were sent by JCS to consult with Gen MacArthur and to review the plans for the Inchon landing, possible alternate landings, and subsequent operations. The JCS after receiving the recommendations of Gen Collins and Adm [sic] Sherman gave unanimous approval of the projected operations including the landing at Inchon.²⁷

This was a slightly abridged and positive version of the events leading up to Chromite. It also incorrectly indicated that the JCS approved of MacArthur's proposed follow-up operations. The Joint Chiefs believed MacArthur's plan unsound, but essentially remained mute on the subject.

²⁶ Ibid. Capitalizations as in original text. Ridgway comes across as a bold, opinionated officer not afraid of speaking his mind. These characteristics would serve him well in later years, first as Eighth Army Commander in Korea, then as CINCFE, and finally as Chief of Staff United States Army.

²⁷ JCS to CINCFE 91763, 16 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

At this point, MacArthur was free to prosecute the war in Korea as he saw fit, his only true limitation being the forces at his disposal.

However, the most difficult decisions for the JCS and other members of the administration involved the overall strategic goal of the war. The question of what outcome to accept in Korea remained of paramount importance to officials in Washington. After the success of the Inchon operation, it appeared possible to unify the whole of Korea rather than simply driving the North Koreans back.²⁸ MacArthur's intended amphibious landing at Wonsan by X Corps and the northward drive of Eighth Army constituted his plan for the destruction of the North Korean Army and the eventual unification of Korea. MacArthur submitted this proposal after receiving authorization from the Joint Chiefs and the president to cross the 38th parallel.

Prior to the Inchon landing MacArthur discussed subsequent operations with Collins and Sherman during their visit to Japan. However, based on notes taken from the meeting, the extent of the planning consisted of the initial envelopment of the North Korean Army. Regarding any thrust northward, "Political aspects of 38th parallel were discussed but regarded as a future consideration." Collins remarks that during the meeting both he and Admiral Sherman agreed that MacArthur should be allowed to pursue the North Korean forces across the parallel. The two JCS members did not authorize the advance at this time. Collins mentions that they needed to wait for the results of a NSC study before granting MacArthur permission for any further operations.²⁹

²⁸ Richard Whelan, *Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 193-202.

²⁹ General Edward Almond, "Notes on the Commander in Chief's Conference on Military Operations in Korea", 24 August 1950, MacArthur Archives; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 144. Schnabel, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, vol. 3, part 1, 222. Prior to this meeting, MacArthur informed Generals Collins and Vandenberg during their visit in July that, "I intend to destroy and not drive back the North Korean Forces, . . . 'I may need to occupy all of Korea. In the aftermath of operations, the problem is to compose and unite Korea.'" Schnabel notes that no further discussion took place regarding the matter.

After Inchon, as the military situation in Korea rapidly became favorable for the U.S. and U.N. forces, the Joint Chiefs were not the only ones debating the decision about crossing the 38th parallel. Secretary of State Acheson notes that two factions existed within the State Department. The first group argued that it would be wise to halt along some line at or near the parallel and settle for a situation as it existed prior to the North Korean invasion. The second position, favored by Acheson, claimed that the North Korean army could be overwhelmed quickly and Korea united through a limited advance.³⁰

The report created by the National Security Council attempted to clarify the administration's policy with regards to Korea. Known as NSC 81/1, it sought to examine the future of United States action in Korea. NSC 81/1 recommended several options which would best "advance the national interest of the United States."³¹ The drafting of NSC 81/1 provoked a mixed reaction from the JCS. According to Collins, the original report allowed for movement across the 38th, but only to pursue enemy forces. Otherwise, the NSC intended the situation in Korea to be stabilized along the 38th parallel. Collins viewed the document as severely limiting the advance of U.N. forces.³²

Bradley also comments about the density of the document, calling the original draft "complex and ambiguous." However, unlike Collins, he stated that nowhere did he feel that it prohibited operations north of the 38th parallel. Bradley indicates that Collins objected the strongest to the document. According to Bradley, "He wanted NSC 81/1 redrafted." Bradley met with the NSC on 7 September where he "presented Joe's reservations, in the name of the full

³⁰ Acheson, *The Korean War*, 49-51; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 109. One of the proponents of the limited strategy was George Kennan, one of the originators of the policy of containment.

³¹ National Security Council, *NSC 81/1: A Report to the President by the National Security Council on United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea*. 9 September 1950. Papers of Harry Truman. Truman Presidential Museum and Library. Independence, MO.

³² Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 145-6.

JCS, taking care to say that I ‘had not had time to study the paper closely.’” In addition to his noncommittal stance on the paper, he does mention several slight revisions made to the document, particularly one suggested by Dean Acheson, who felt that the original provided MacArthur with too free of a hand in operating in North Korea.³³

The criticisms raised by Collins perhaps originated from section twelve of the document, which recommended that any operations above the 38th parallel ought to be cleared before the United Nations Security Council in light of the original resolution. However, NSC 81/1 merely suggested this clearance. Section fifteen outlined the main arguments for a continued advance in to North Korea.³⁴

More importantly, the JCS reaction to NSC 81/1 indicates a shift in attitude among some, if not all, members of the Joint Chiefs. Prior to and even in the aftermath of the North Korean invasion, the Joint Chiefs regarded Korea as an area not worth any substantial commitment. Now, slightly more than two months later, Collins and perhaps other members of the JCS argued that General MacArthur should be allowed the freedom to continue his operations into North Korea. In a recommendation to the secretary of defense, the Joint Chiefs expressed the desire that following the routing of the North Korean Army, “subsequent operations should take place both north and south of the 38th parallel.”³⁵

It has been argued that had MacArthur stabilized and reinforced the 38th parallel, then North Korea would have been placed into a defensive position, especially considering that the U.S. indicated its commitment to maintaining a free South Korea. In his book *Korea: The*

³³ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 559-61.

³⁴ NSC, *NSC 81/1*, Papers of Harry Truman. Section 15 stated that, “the United Nations forces have a legal basis for conducting operations north of the 38th parallel to compel the withdrawal of the North Korean forces behind this line or to defeat these forces.”

³⁵ JCS, *Record of the Actions Taken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff Relative to the United Nations Operations in Korea From 25 June 1950 to 11 April 1951*, 30 April 1951, The Omar N. Bradley Papers, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

Limited War, historian David Rees claims that U.S. officials overcome with the “intoxication of victory” were blinded to any serious consideration of the implications of a drive deep into North Korea. D. Clayton James maintains that political factor, such as the upcoming elections and an increasing anti-communist lobby, also played a role in the decision.³⁶

The speed with which MacArthur’s forces drove the enemy backwards forced a decision to be reached far earlier than anticipated. The intent of the U.S. and U.N. involvement remained the key question regarding future operations. John Spanier maintains that U.S. officials never intended to unite Korea through military force. They reasoned that Korea would become one nation through elections held after the conflict ended. However, according to Spanier the only way to achieve this unification was through the complete destruction of the North Korean Army.³⁷ Thus the decision to cross the 38th parallel came about through the necessity of achieving stability once the U.N. forces withdrew.

D. Clayton James argues that the decision arrived at by the State and Defense Departments was “so irrational from both military and diplomatic perspectives that the roots of it must lie in a phenomenon of groupthink among Truman and his inner circle of advisers.”³⁸ Echoing Spanier, James asserts that the U.N. resolution authorizing the military action in Korea provided enough justification for the continued advance. South Korea, and by extrapolation any future unified Korea, could not be safe until the Communist army of North Korea had been utterly wiped out.

According to Bradley, the JCS unanimously favored operating north of the 38th parallel, with the sole restriction of employing ROK forces north of the line supported by U.S. air and

³⁶ Richard Whelan, *Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953* (Boston; Little, Brown, and Company, 1990), 194-5; Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, 103; James, *Refighting the Last War*, 195.

³⁷ Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy*, 89-90.

³⁸ James, *Refighting the Last War*, 195.

naval operations. They hoped that by only utilizing ROK troops, the Chinese would not feel pressured to enter the conflict.³⁹

It is impossible to argue with any certainty what might have happened had the U.S. not advanced into North Korea. The fact remains however, that after Operation Chromite, the goal with which the United States intervened in Korea had been attained. Had the Joint Chiefs of Staff truly sought to a limited war in Korea, they could easily have recommended halting MacArthur's advance at or slightly north of the 38th parallel. They made no such suggestions. Instead, members of the Joint Chiefs argued persuasively for an enlargement of the directive authorizing military action in Korea. They were not alone in their belief. Members of the Department of State, including Secretary Acheson, as well as the new Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall, all believed in the reasonableness of such a course of action. With the concurrence of the National Security Council and the State Department, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President approved NSC 81/1.⁴⁰

By choosing to cross the 38th parallel, the Joint Chiefs recognized the possibility of Soviet or Chinese intervention. They concluded, as did everyone else involved including the State Department and MacArthur, that neither nation would come to the assistance of North Korea. In short, the possibility of such an event existed, but it was deemed not probable. Taking NSC 81/1 as the model, the Joint Chiefs drafted a new set of orders for MacArthur.

³⁹ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 559.

⁴⁰ Condit, *The Test of War*, 34-5. General Marshall replaced the former Defense Secretary Louis Johnson on 21 September 1950; James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume III, 1945-1964*, 486-8. National Security Council, *NSC 81/1: A Report to the President by the National Security Council on United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea*. 9 September 1950. Papers of Harry Truman. Truman Presidential Museum and Library. Independence, MO. In addition, NSC 81/1 stipulated that in the event of Soviet or CCF intervention, the U.N. troops would move to the defensive. Furthermore, MacArthur was prohibited from utilizing non-ROK forces along the Soviet and Manchurian border regions. In short, NSC 81/1 committed the U.S. to the destruction of the North Korean People's Army and the unification of Korea.

The JCS presented these instructions to MacArthur on 27 September, indicating that the orders although current, “could not be considered final.” The Joint Chiefs directive stated:

Your mil objective is the destruction of the North Korean Armed Forces. In attaining this objective you are authorized to conduct mil operations, including amphibious and airborne landings or ground operations north of the 38th parallel in Korea, provided that at the time of such operation there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea.⁴¹

These orders surely indicated to MacArthur a desire for complete victory in Korea. Additionally, it presumably reinforced his belief that the Joint Chiefs were in agreement with his plans for future operations in Korea.

In preparation for the advance, the JCS instructed MacArthur to broadcast a message to the North Korean Commander-in-Chief, to which MacArthur made some minor revisions. The message called for the North Korean Army to lay down its arms and accept the reunification of Korea under United Nations supervision.⁴² In essence, the Joint Chiefs empowered MacArthur to confer with North Korea’s leadership over a potential end to the war.

MacArthur replied to the JCS that the ultimatum would be sent out on 1 October. He also presented his plans for advancing north, including the Wonsan operation. In addition, he stated that at present there was no indication “of entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Forces.”⁴³ As MacArthur planned his future operations, he received a curious dispatch from Secretary of Defense George Marshall. The telegram concerned a report in which Eighth Army

⁴¹ JCS to CINCFE 92801, 27 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

⁴² JCS to CINCFE 92762, 27 September 1950, Records of the JCS; CINCFE to JCS 64730, 28 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

⁴³ CINCFE to JCS 64805, 28 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

Commander General Walton Walker announced that Eighth Army would halt and regroup at the 38th parallel. Walker seemed to imply that he would await further orders to cross the parallel. In response to Walker's statement, Marshall cabled MacArthur that Washington wanted him "to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of 38th parallel."⁴⁴

The vague wording of this message led to yet another divergence between MacArthur and officials in Washington. Dean Acheson interpreted this message as allowing MacArthur to "feel unhampered in proceeding north, except as his orders confined him."⁴⁵ However, MacArthur's previous plan indicated that he understood the orders prepared for him. In fact, he explicitly stated that, "ROK Army forces only will conduct operation north of the line Chungjo-Yongwon-Hungnam."⁴⁶ In response to Marshall's message, MacArthur replied that he felt concerned about his supply lines, not the 38th parallel. In MacArthur's view his orders to destroy the North Korean Army, not the arbitrary dividing line between North and South Korea, directed the extent of his operations in the region. In response to Marshall's "eyes only" message MacArthur stated that, "I regard all of Korea open for our military operations."⁴⁷

The changed situation in Korea forced the United States to reevaluate its mission. Prior to the North Korean invasion, the president, the secretary of state, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as CINCFE General MacArthur, each accepted the de facto state of a Korea arbitrarily divided. When the U.S. and later the U.N. intervened in Korea, it did so with the limited goal of restoring stability to the region. The Joint Chiefs of Staff repeatedly emphasized this point when dealing

⁴⁴ JCS to CINCFE from SECDEF 92985, 29 September 1950, Records of the JCS. Marshall's message seems to imply that the U.N. wanted to avoid the issue of the 38th parallel and that if MacArthur crossed the boundary then no vote would be necessary, thus avoiding a potentially embarrassing issue.

⁴⁵ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 453-4.

⁴⁶ CINCFE to JCS 64805, 28 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

⁴⁷ CINCFE to JCS for SECDEF 65034, 30 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

with MacArthur's repeated requests for reinforcements. They made these decisions as the U.N. forces found themselves pinned against the coast along the Pusan perimeter.

General MacArthur, hoping to reduce the pressure on his forces in Korea conceived an audacious plan to encircle the advancing North Koreans. Despite several reservations, the JCS approved his plan, resulting in the amphibious landing at Inchon. The success of this operation created a new situation much more favorable to the United States. The opportunity for a unified Korea, free of Communist influence persuaded the State and Defense Departments to consider the possibility of continuing operations into North Korea.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with this point of view. When it appeared that the NSC favored a more limited advance northward, members of the JCS, most specifically General Collins, argued in favor of continuing operations in North Korea. This constituted a reversal of their earlier position with regards to Korea. It also found them increasingly in agreement with MacArthur over the desired outcome. This shift is not entirely surprising in light of the fact that the four members of the JCS gained the preponderance of their command experience in World War II. The totality of that effort invariably influenced their conceptions of victory.

However, as the Joint Chiefs increasingly involved themselves in strategic issues, they decreased their involvement in the operational issues of the war. Even when they disagreed with choices made by MacArthur, such as the Inchon operation or the division of X Corps and VIII Army, they took a passive stance towards their subordinate. This undoubtedly resulted somewhat from MacArthur's history and personality. By this point, his career spanned nearly fifty years in the military. In contrast, General Bradley, the oldest of the chiefs, was thirteen years his junior. The success of MacArthur's Inchon assault also contributed to the reluctance of the Joint Chiefs

to question his decisions. Nowhere was this timidity more evident than in MacArthur's plans for a northern advance. Despite serious tactical flaws in the plan, the Joint Chiefs approved it.

The choices made during the period from September through October 1950 resulted in serious ramifications for the United Nations command in Korea. Although the North Korean attack had been repulsed, the danger of Soviet or Chinese entry into the war remained. The decision to enter North Korea was made with the belief that such intervention, although possible, was highly unlikely. This proved to be a shortsighted evaluation by all parties involved.

CHAPTER 5

CHINESE INTERVENTION AND RECALL

The third phase of the Korean War is marked by the entry of Chinese forces into the conflict in November 1950. This event occurred as the U. N. forces drove northwards into North Korea towards the Yalu River, the boundary between Korean and China. The intervention of China caused the Truman Administration to confront the possibility of a general war. The potential of such an escalation forced Truman, Acheson, and the Joint Chiefs to abandon their goal of unifying Korea. Once they realized the extent of the Chinese involvement, officials in Washington again appeared to be satisfied with restoration of the status quo in Korea, namely the division of the country at the 38th parallel.

In contrast, General MacArthur viewed the Chinese attack as an opportunity to check the expansion of Communism in Asia. He sought to continue his advance and defeat the North Koreans, while driving the Chinese troops back across the border. Cognizant, but seemingly unafraid of the potential danger, MacArthur continually pressed his superiors for increased freedom of action within Korea. MacArthur's incessant demands exacerbated the personality conflicts between himself and officials in Washington.

During this period, the Joint Chiefs refused to directly confront MacArthur about his protestations. Despite a presidential directive which essentially amounted to a gag order, MacArthur continued to publicly air his discontent at the direction of the war. As MacArthur strove to increase military pressure on the Chinese, the Joint Chiefs increasingly sought to limit the fighting to Korea. This fundamental difference in opinion resulted in the dismissal of General MacArthur from his command in April 1951, not by the Joint Chiefs but by President Truman.

Prior to Chinese intervention, President Truman and other officials met with MacArthur to discuss the progress and future direction within Korea. At the Wake Island meeting on 15 October 1950, MacArthur assured the President that the chance of Soviet or Chinese interference was “very little.” General Bradley, the lone representative from the JCS, offered little based on notes taken from the meeting. While MacArthur and Truman discussed upcoming operations and the potential to have Eighth Army back in Japan by Christmas, Bradley remained silent. In fact, Bradley’s main concern seemed to be his desire to transfer several divisions from MacArthur’s command to Europe.¹

In his memoirs, Bradley writes that MacArthur “appeared to understand fully and appreciate our need to reduce his forces in order to build NATO and professed that he would cooperate to his utmost.”² Bradley’s comments show a clear misunderstanding between himself and MacArthur regarding operations in Korea versus U.S. commitments around the globe. He believed that MacArthur finally accepted the position that Europe dominated U.S. policy decisions.

In reality, MacArthur still felt that Asia was the place where the United States could take a stand against Communism. He did not challenge Bradley because he intended to complete combat operations in Korea by December. Furthermore, once he returned his troops to Japan, Eighth Army would “have nothing to do with occupation.”³ Thus, MacArthur saw no need for the additional troops provided to him at the start of the Korean conflict, which explains why he did not object to their transfer in January 1951.

¹ *Substance of Statements Made at Wake Island Conference on 15 October 1950*, Records of the JCS. MacArthur assured Truman that if the Chinese entered Korea, “there would be the greatest slaughter.”

² Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 577.

³ *Wake Island Conference*, Records of the JCS.

Throughout October, as the U. N. forces pressed closer to the Yalu River, the threat of Chinese intervention appeared a distinct possibility. A telegram dated 9 October indicates that the JCS had at least given some thought to the entry of Chinese Forces. The JCS augmented MacArthur's previous instructions "in light of the possible intervention of Chinese Communist forces in North Korea." The Joint Chiefs instructed MacArthur that in the event of Chinese forces into Korea, he "should continue the action as long as, in your judgment, action by forces now under your control offers a reasonable chance of success."⁴ This message clearly implies that the JCS desired to continue operations within North Korea even if China introduced troops. Regardless of later claims to the contrary, the JCS and MacArthur appeared to agree on the course of action in Korea.

The unity of opinion between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and MacArthur would end on 24 October, when MacArthur issued orders stating that he was lifting restrictions on the use of U.N. forces in North Korea. This directly contradicted the JCS directive of 27 September which stated, "As a matter of policy, no non-Korean Ground Forces will be used in the northeast provinces bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border."⁵ Hoping to finish off the remnants of the North Korean Army, MacArthur authorized the commanders of Eighth Army and X Corps to use "any and all ground forces of your command as necessary to secure all of North Korea." He did stipulate however, that these troops should be withdrawn as quickly as possible from areas near the border and replaced with ROK forces.⁶

The JCS cabled MacArthur informing him that the order to his troops was not in accordance with the directives given to him previously. Once again, the JCS failed to directly

⁴ JCS to CINCFE 93709, 9 October 1950, Records of the JCS.

⁵ JCS to CINCFE 92801, 27 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

challenge MacArthur. Rather than order him to rescind his directive, they simply stated that although he “undoubtedly had sound reasons for issuing these instructions they [JCS] would like to be informed of them as your action is a matter of some concern here.”⁷ By giving MacArthur the chance to explain his reasons for these instructions rather than simply commanding him to retract them, the JCS implied that the orders could stand.

Once again arguing his case, MacArthur claimed that his orders were necessary due to the inability of ROK forces to effectively deal with security in North Korea. He stated that he believed he was well within his purview as commander to issue such orders based upon the instructions provided by the JCS:

There is no conflict that I can see with the directive contained in JCS 92801 dated 27 Sept, which merely enunciated the provision as a matter of policy and clearly stated: “these instr [sic], however, cannot be considered to be final since they may require modification in accordance with developments. The necessary latitude for modification was contained also in JCS 92985 which stated: “we want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38th parallel.”⁸

Once again, MacArthur challenged his superiors. Just as he had done during the Inchon landing, MacArthur emerged from his battle with the Joint Chiefs victorious.

Much like their previous dealings with MacArthur, the JCS allowed him to control the situation. Clay Blair argues that this was due to the fact that MacArthur’s forces seemed assured

⁶ CINCU.N.C to CGARMYEIGHT KOREA; etc. 67291, 24 October 1950, Records of the JCS. In MacArthur’s eyes this caveat preserved the wishes of the JCS, who simply did not want U.S. troops operating close to the border regions.

⁷ JCS to CINCFE 94933, 24 October 1950, Records of the JCS.

⁸ CINCFE to JCS 67397, 25 October 1950, Records of the JCS. The JCS order stated that MacArthur’s mission was to destroy the North Korean Army. Realizing that political events might change the goal of the mission in Korea, the JCS told MacArthur that “these instructions, however, cannot be considered to be final since they may require modification in accordance with developments.” See JCS to CINCFE 92608, 27 September 1950, Records of the JCS.

of imminent victory. The chiefs did not want to appear as overly cautious or take such action which might endanger troops. Additionally, Blair maintains that both the chiefs and MacArthur knew the true purpose of both the September directive and Marshall's communiqué. If any modification of orders occurred, it should have come from Washington, not from Asia.⁹ Subsequent events not only forced a revision of MacArthur's mission, but also of U.S. policy in Korea. In late October, as U.N. troops advanced towards the Yalu River, the Chinese Forces crossed into North Korea.

The entry of the Chinese into the war forced the JCS, as well as the rest of Truman's Administration, to quickly re-assess the course of action in Korea.¹⁰ Not knowing at first the size of the forces the Chinese committed to Korea, the JCS asked MacArthur for his appraisal of the situation. MacArthur's initial replies indicated four possibilities, but concluded that the Chinese were most likely preparing to offer limited or even covert assistance to the North Koreans, and such forces would be insufficient to hinder the U.N. mission.¹¹ The JCS indicated no reservations with MacArthur's conclusions. Bradley labeled MacArthur's message as "utterly reassuring," and thus the JCS left the decisions yet again to their theater commander.¹²

Two days later, in a rare instance, the JCS actually countermanded an order MacArthur issued when he directed the Air Force to destroy bridges along the Yalu River linking China and Korea. Recognizing the potential severity of such an action General George Stratemeyer, the commander of the Far East Air Force, telephoned the Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt

⁹ Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 364.

¹⁰ The entry of the Chinese forces is covered in several sources. See Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*; Matthew Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 60-78; Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 71-85.

¹¹ JCS to CINCFE 95790, 3 November 1950, Records of the JCS; CINCFE to DEPTAR for CSUSA for JCS 68285, 4 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

¹² Bradley, *A General's Life*, 583-4.

Vandenberg directly.¹³ After consulting with the State Department, it was decided that the political implications outweighed the necessity of destroying the bridges. The JCS frantically ordered Stratemeyer to postpone the attacks via several redline messages. MacArthur was sent a similar dispatch.¹⁴

MacArthur did not take this limiting of his options well, in fact his entire rhetoric towards the JCS changed at this point. He promptly replied with a hysterical message implying that the Chinese Forces posed an imminent threat to his command. Claiming that “men and material in large force are pouring across all bridges over the Yalu from Manchuria,” MacArthur protested that the JCS order be reconsidered and that the issue be taken directly to the President.¹⁵ In his memoirs, Bradley states that this outburst from MacArthur was a blatant insult to the Joint Chiefs. He believes that MacArthur thought the JCS was “a bunch of nitwits and that MacArthur would not accept orders from anyone but the President on this matter.” Bradley apparently did not consider this an act of insubordination.¹⁶ Rather than let the matter drop, the JCS acquiesced to MacArthur’s demands and took the issue to Truman, who authorized the bombing of the bridges. The JCS promptly cabled MacArthur informing him that he was authorized to bomb the Korean ends of the bridges.¹⁷ By not letting their order to MacArthur stand, they no doubt played into his arrogance by referring the matter to the President. Truman’s decision to allow limited bombing of the bridges also weakened the Joint Chief’s position of authority over MacArthur.

¹³ Ibid, 584-5; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 199-200.

¹⁴ Hoyt Vandenberg to George Stratemeyer, Redline Message, 6 November 1950, Papers of Hoyt Vandenberg, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Vandenberg to COMGENFEAF Stratemeyer, Redline Message, 6 November 1950, Papers of Hoyt S. Vandenberg; George Stratemeyer to Hoyt Vandenberg, Redline Message, 6 November 1950, Papers of Hoyt S. Vandenberg; JCS to CINCFE, 6 November 1950, Records of the JCS; George Stratemeyer to Hoyt Vandenberg, Redline Message, 7 November 1950, Papers of Hoyt S. Vandenberg.

¹⁵ CINCFE to JCS 68396, 6 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

¹⁶ Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 585-7; CINCFE to JCS 68396, 6 November 1950, Records of the JCS. This belief is perhaps because MacArthur’s last line informed the JCS that although he was protesting the order, “complete compliance will of course be given to your order.” MacArthur was an egomaniac, but he was not a stupid soldier.

¹⁷ JCS to CINCFE 95949, 6 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

The JCS in essence removed themselves from the chain of command by not maintaining a firm stance with respect to their subordinate.

With the entry of the Chinese forces, the JCS re-examined the focus of the mission in Korea. They began by reviewing the situation and possible courses of action in response to the Chinese intervention. The JCS requested MacArthur's opinion and he replied with a plan to resume the offensive beginning on 15 November 1950.¹⁸ After deliberating, the chiefs concluded that the U.N. forces should immediately take up a defensive line at a point north of the 38th parallel. Both the secretaries of defense and state were advised of this recommendation, but the JCS did not order MacArthur to halt his advance.¹⁹ Instead, he was merely informed that his mission might change, given a list of options, and again asked for his opinion. As had happened so many times previously, MacArthur was never explicitly given new orders by the JCS.²⁰ Dean Acheson would later condemn the JCS, along with the rest of the government, for not being more forceful with MacArthur at this moment. In his memoirs, Bradley expresses regret as well and contends that Acheson's criticism is not without merit. His explanation as to why the JCS did not step in was that they did not want to interfere with a theater commander. They also felt that they did not possess enough intelligence information to make an informed decision.²¹ Spanier argues that this was precisely the moment when the administration should have stepped in to take a forceful hand with MacArthur in light of the political issues involved in a limited war. According to Spanier, the Joint Chiefs responsibility for strategic decisions implied that they could and

¹⁸ JCS to CINCFE 96060, 8 November 1950, Records of the JCS; CINCFE to JCS 68572, 9 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

¹⁹ S. Taylor to Admiral Forrest Sherman, Memorandum for Admiral, 20 April 1950, Office Files of Forrest P. Sherman, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

²⁰ JCS to CINCU.N.C 97237, 24 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

²¹ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 587-8; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 466-8.

should, if the situation dictated, intervene to provide precise direction to a theater commander.²² This was particularly true if a commander's intended actions threatened to jeopardize the overall strategic goals of the United States.

MacArthur still believed by late November that he could attain his objectives of destroying the North Korean Army and occupying all of Korea. He advocated this action even though it might have precipitated a larger war with China.²³ In a short time, however, an estimated 200,000 Chinese soldiers overran U.N. positions, and eventually precipitated strategic retreats, such as the Marine withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir area.²⁴

The Joint Chiefs regarded MacArthur's advance with trepidation since they did not yet know the full extent of the Chinese commitment. The JCS cabled MacArthur about the impending offensive and recommended that he might consider taking up a defensive line across the peninsula rather than continue his drive towards the Yalu. MacArthur replied that, "it would be utterly impossible for us to stop upon commanding terrain south of the river as suggested and there be in a position to hold under effective control its lines of approach to North Korea."²⁵

David Rees argues that the JCS could have ordered MacArthur to halt, but they did not do so for several reasons. First was the previously stated reluctance to meddle in the decisions of a theater commander. Second, the overpowering personality of MacArthur made such an action difficult. Finally, and more importantly, he claims the Joint Chiefs saw such a move not as a military decision, but one of policy. Thus they felt that it should be the State Department's

²² Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War*, 133-4. Spanier asks, "should the commander on the battlefield, in a sensitive limited war situation, have sole jurisdiction over tactical decisions with such vast strategic and political implications?"

²³ CINCUNC to JCS 69808, 25 November 1950, Records of the JCS. MacArthur seemed to imply that any action short of victory in Korea would embolden the Chinese by causing the U.N. to lose face. His belief in his understanding of the Asian mind was undoubtedly at work here.

²⁴ Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 69. Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 94-6.

²⁵ WAR to CINCUNC 97287, 24 November 1950, Records of the JCS; CINCUNC to JCS 69808, 25 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

responsibility to advise President Truman to halt the offensive, not the JCS. Acheson did not do so because he believed such a recommendation must come from the President's military advisors.²⁶ In any event, no one challenged MacArthur's "home by Christmas" offensive, and his troops soon found themselves facing the brunt of the Chinese Army.

This reversal appeared to alter MacArthur's view of the war. On 28 November, he informed the JCS that he was moving to a defensive position due to the new situation being beyond his control. This message implied that although he believed the war was still winnable, Washington would not allow him the flexibility or the materials necessary to do so. The following day, MacArthur again requested that he be allowed to utilize Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces in his defense of Korea. The JCS approved his plan of establishing a defensive position, but not his demand for the employment of Nationalist troops on the grounds that it would disrupt the unity of the United Nations Command.²⁷ To MacArthur, the U.S. needed to make a total effort in Korea or withdraw.

Officially, the JCS urged caution, however their views were far from unanimous. On a trip to Korea and Tokyo, General Collins left with a favorable impression of the situation. In his estimation, Eighth Army seemed not as fatigued and battered as MacArthur led the JCS to believe. After talking to the field commanders, Collins formed the opinion that the Chinese could not force the U.N. out of Korea.²⁸ He recommended more limited aims, such as holding the current position and forcing a cease-fire on favorable terms. Bradley noted that Collins' report was a "ray of sunshine."²⁹ Complete withdrawal, the course Bradley and Collins believed MacArthur advocated, was not the only option. In reality, MacArthur wanted to force the

²⁶ Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, 150-1.

²⁷ CINCFE to JCS 69953, 28 November 1950, Records of the JCS; CINCU.N.C to JCS 50021, 29 November 1950, Records of the JCS; JCS to CINCFE 97594, 29 November 1950, Records of the JCS.

²⁸ CINCFE (SGD Collins) to JCS 50371, 4 December 1950, Records of the JCS; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 231-3.

administration to commit to Korea and fight or recognize that the self imposed limitations offered no chance for success. The tone of his dispatches revealed his belief that if the U.S. and U.N. did not increase their presence in Korea, and the Far East in general, then he saw no choice but to pull out of Korea on the best possible terms. MacArthur continued his requests for more troops, either from the U.S., the U.N., or Nationalist China.³⁰

The report by General Collins changed the Joint Chiefs' view of the situation in Korea. The disparity between MacArthur's assessment and Collins' impression of the overall tactical outlook forced the Joint Chiefs to seriously reconsider MacArthur's proposed actions. Still unwilling to challenge the venerable General, the JCS took no action. General Ridgway offers some insight as to the mindset of the JCS at this time:

It was at this meeting, and during a brief break, or as the meeting was breaking up that Vandenberg and I were discussing possible directives to MacArthur to correct his gravely faulty tactical dispositions. "Why isn't he told by the JCS or higher authority 'what to do'?", I asked. "He won't do it," said Van, "What can you do?" "You can relieve him, can't you," I replied. Van's mouth visibly opened, but he said nothing.³¹

Throughout this period, MacArthur, and quite possibly other military leaders within his command, remained convinced of the failure of a limited war policy. Admiral Sherman noted that, in his mind, the issue was that, "the Chinese want to stop fighting and stay while we want to leave."³² The problem was that MacArthur would not remain silent. In two separate interviews, MacArthur claimed that the administration's restrictions hampered his ability to mount a

²⁹ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 606-7.

³⁰ CINCFE to JCS 52391, 30 December 1950, Records of the JCS.

³¹ Ridgway Memo, undated, Matthew B. Ridgway Papers; Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Report on Visit to FECOM and Korea, December 4-7, 1950, 8 December 1950, Matthew B. Ridgway Papers. Most likely it was at this meeting where Ridgway spoke to Vandenberg.

³² Sherman Memo to JCS, 20 April, 1951, Papers of Forrest Sherman.

successful offensive against the North Koreans and Chinese Forces.³³ These outbursts prompted Truman to take indirect public action against the General. On 6 December 1950, Truman issued an order to all commands that “no speech, press release, or other public statement concerning foreign policy should be released until it has received clearance from the Department of State.” Another section of this statement pertained to military matters. In short, Truman instituted a gag order against his commanders. In reality, the directive was intended primarily for General MacArthur.³⁴

The attempt to silence MacArthur occurred even as debate raged within Washington over the proper course of action in Korea. Admiral Sherman told a meeting of the JCS and administration officials on 3 December that, “the only issue was peace or war, that we had lost the campaign, but not a war, that we are not a defeated nation, and should tell the Chinese Communists to get out of Korea or face war – no self-imposed limitations.”³⁵ After a request from MacArthur for more troops, Sherman again advocated an almost similar course of action to that of MacArthur:

Rusk still talking “cease fire.” I said we should get out of Korea at the right time – that we would raise our prestige in Europe – the country would welcome it, and our loss of prestige in Asia would be less than if we stayed and underwent a disaster; ... and that left us no choice but to redeploy to Japan now enough troops to make Japan secure and follow with the others. Certainly we should not send more troops West when our principle responsibility lies in the East.³⁶

³³ James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume III*, 540-1.

³⁴ JCS to CINCEUR, etc., 98134, 6 December 1950, Records of the JCS.

³⁵ Sherman memo to JCS, 20 April 1951, Papers of Forrest Sherman.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

In Sherman's view, the administration established a limited commitment to Korea from the start. It made no sense to stay there in the face of unlimited Chinese intervention. Also, the Chinese, not the Soviets, had shown themselves willing to resort to force. To Sherman, this established the Far East as more of a priority area than Europe. The records do not indicate the views of the remaining chiefs, but this memo demonstrates the dissonance of opinion within the JCS.

As the crisis in Korea intensified, the administration considered a cease-fire. The JCS asked MacArthur for his views on what he believed would be acceptable terms. He presented a list of five demands that he felt should be met for a cease-fire to go into effect. In addition, on 30 December 1950, MacArthur presented a list of several recommended courses of action regarding the Far East situation: a blockade of the Chinese coast; the destruction of China's industrial bases; the utilization of Nationalist forces within Korea; and allow Taiwan to conduct strikes against China itself as a diversion.³⁷

The JCS rejected his demands as not likely to occur given the mood in Washington. They also issued MacArthur several new directives, one of them being to "inflict the maximum damage to hostile forces in Korea, subject to primary consideration of the safety of your troops and your basic mission of protecting Japan."³⁸ MacArthur, in what amounted to a direct challenge to both the JCS and Truman, asked if the U.S. was committed to Korea, or intended to evacuate the country.³⁹

Of course, the infliction of "maximum damage" meant different things to MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs. MacArthur questioned the rationale of continued operations in Korea without a clear goal. He claims that "there was no doubt but that a beachhead line could be held by our

³⁷ JCS to CINCFE 98608, 11 December 1950, Records of the JCS; CINCFE to JCS 51052, 12 December 1950, Records of the JCS. CINCFE to JCS 52391, 30 December 1950, Records of the JCS. These recommendations included blockading the Chinese coast and also, once again, releasing restrictions on the Nationalist troops.

³⁸ JCS to CINCFE 80680, 9 January 1951, Records of the JCS.

existing forces for a limited time, but this could not be accomplished without losses. Whether such losses were to be regarded as 'severe' or not would to a certain extent depend upon the connotation one gives the term."⁴⁰ In essence, was the conflict in Korea truly worth the continued casualties it would surely result in? Whether or not MacArthur truly believed this is debatable. Regardless, the question did merit asking both for the troops on the ground and the general public within the United States.

General Collins maintains that MacArthur's query received consideration from the JCS. In meetings with the State Department, He states that the discussion almost always involved the issue of what the U.S. military could do versus what the U.S. government wanted to do in Korea. According to Collins, "I must admit that I personally, and, I believe, the JCS as a group, had considerable sympathy for MacArthur in the dilemma presented to him by this directive."

The State Department's argument is illustrated best by Secretary of State Acheson. Recalling a meeting with Generals Marshall and Bradley, Acheson states that he felt "the United Nations should not withdraw until we tested Chinese strength fully and found that dire military necessity required it."⁴¹ Rather than strive towards an actual objective which the U.S. sought in Korea, he implies that an upper limit of casualties existed before the U.S. considered withdrawal. No doubt some within the military viewed such a point of view as callous and lacking clarity of purpose.

In contrast to Collins, Bradley saw no such conflict in the directive to MacArthur, at least none he ventured to state publicly. According to Bradley, "To the JCS, these orders were as clear as crystal. MacArthur's forces were to fight as hard as possible, inflicting utmost possible damage on the enemy but avoiding *severe* (i.e., catastrophic) losses, so that the Eighth Army

³⁹ CINU.N.C to JCS 53167, 10 January 1951, Records of the JCS.

⁴⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 380.

would be able to defend Japan.”⁴² MacArthur obviously did not agree with the rationale. Apparently, Collins also had some difficulty rationalizing the soundness of the decision.

Either because of internal disagreement or for some other reason entirely, the JCS again failed to take decisive action towards their subordinate. They sent MacArthur another telegram restating that the directives of 9 January 1951 remained in effect. Bradley claims that this amounted to a third warning and that MacArthur was forcing Washington to explain every order before he followed it.⁴³ This presented the perfect opportunity for the JCS to take action towards MacArthur. General Matthew Ridgeway’s actions stabilized the situation on the Korean front, yet MacArthur still spoke like a defeatist.⁴⁴ To make matters worse, he questioned every order from Washington, seemingly in the hope that by arguing enough, he would get his way. Rees hypothesizes that MacArthur sent such gloomy dispatches not because he believed the situation to be hopeless, but rather so that the Joint Chiefs would support his proposed courses of action. That the JCS did not take stern action in the face of such blatant disregard for their authority indicates that they at least grudgingly accepted that his position merited some consideration. In order to ascertain the validity of MacArthur’s opinion, Generals Collins and Vandenberg traveled to Korea to prepare a report for the other Joint Chiefs and the president. Their conclusions directly contradicted MacArthur’s alarmist protests.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 248-9; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 514.

⁴² Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 618-9. Italics included as contained in the in original text.

⁴³ JCS to CINCFE 53167, 12 January 1951, Records of the JCS; Bradley, *A General’s Life*, 619-20.

⁴⁴ The appointment of Matthew Ridgeway to the command of Eighth Army was a welcome relief. Not only did he manage to stop the Chinese advance, he mounted a counteroffensive that regained much of the lost territory and stabilized the front slightly north of the 38th parallel. One of the best accounts of this period remains Ridgeway’s *The Korean War*. See especially pages 78-123.

⁴⁵ General Vandenberg Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, 19 January 1951, Papers of Hoyt Vandenberg. The report indicated that U.N. forces were strong enough to hold out for as long as the U.S. required them to, unless the Soviets intervened. They also stated that no troops could be released from Korea to Japan. In their view, the situation in Korea had, at the time, reached stability and that in order to secure Japan, additional divisions should be sent from the U.S.

Events proved that it was indeed possible to hold a defensive line in Korea. In a brilliant display of combat leadership, General Ridgway gradually regained most of the lost ground over the following months. During this period, military leaders in Washington and the Far East could ascertain the extent of Chinese involvement. The only real question remained what outcome the U.S. was willing to accept in Korea. American officials questioned whether to call for a unified Korea or again accept a nation divided arbitrarily.

By March of 1951, President Truman and the State Department came to the conclusion that the situation as it then existed in Korea was favorable for offering settlement terms. The President planned to make a public announcement calling for negotiations. On 20 March, the JCS informed MacArthur of the president's intentions.⁴⁶ MacArthur responded by issuing an ultimatum to the Chinese and North Korean Forces on 24 March. Despite two earlier ultimatums by MacArthur, this incident caught Washington completely off-guard and undermined the position of the President.

James suggests that MacArthur believed Truman planned to negotiate with the Chinese and sell out Taiwan. This irrational fear forced MacArthur to trump the President's message. In contrast, John Spanier contends that the true goal of the ultimatum was to force China to reject all calls for a cease-fire. He argues that MacArthur wanted a "continuation of the war."⁴⁷ The president was furious at MacArthur's latest utterance, as were members of the State Department. Truman writes in his memoirs that MacArthur's proclamation "was in open defiance of my orders."⁴⁸ Acheson calls this "a major act of sabotage of a government operation."⁴⁹ In a final

⁴⁶ JCS to CINCFE 86276, 20 March 1951. The JCS also asked MacArthur what freedom of action he required while these negotiations would take place. This was yet again another example of trying to control MacArthur on one hand and collaborating with him on the other. A situation he clearly did not take comfortably.

⁴⁷ James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume III*, 585-588. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War*, 200-2.

⁴⁸ Truman, *Memoirs: Volume II*, 441-2.

⁴⁹ Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 518.

warning to MacArthur, the JCS quickly drafted a message reminding him of Truman's December gag order.

The military advisors to the president, the JCS, made no recommendations regarding this situation. The personal papers of the individual chiefs are also vague regarding this incident. Bradley quotes from Truman's memoirs, but gives no indication of his thoughts on the situation except that it was "an unforgivable and irretrievable act." Collins states that MacArthur, "ignored, or possibly had forgotten," the President's gag order when he released his March statement. During his congressional testimony Collins said of the incident that MacArthur "did something that in my judgment a field commander ought not to do."⁵⁰ Sherman recalled that the JCS created a message for MacArthur, but that later in the day "the President released a harsher version drafted by State." In a handwritten note, Sherman simply called MacArthur's action "jumping the gun."⁵¹

This incident was important for several reasons. First, Truman used it a justification when he finally relieved MacArthur in April. Second, the opinions of the Joint Chiefs regarding the severity of MacArthur's actions differed even after his relief. In particular, Collins remained almost apologetic about the episode. Finally, Truman essentially removed the Joint Chiefs from the chain of command by consulting with the State Department to draft the message.

Released on 5 April 1951, MacArthur's letter to Congressman Joseph Martin was the last straw. Truman, after hearing of it accidentally, determined that, "our big general in the Far East must be recalled."⁵² He did not do so immediately, but decided to ask his advisors for their

⁵⁰ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 627; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 280; Congress, *Far East Hearings*, 1193.

⁵¹ Sherman, Memo to JCS, 20 April 1951, Papers of Forrest Sherman; Admiral Forrest Sherman, Untitled Note, 1951 (?), Office Files of Forrest P. Sherman, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C. Sherman's congressional testimony is also very circumspect regarding the incident, although this may have more to do with the questions asked of him, mainly involving content and substance of the messages.

⁵² Truman, *Off the Record*, 210-1. Truman states he saw the text of the letter in a paper he happened to pick up that morning. Diary Omar N. Bradley Chairman JCS: 2 Jan 1951-31 Dec 1951, Papers of General Omar N. Bradley,

recommendations. Upon hearing the news of the letter, the situation between MacArthur and the administration achieved critical status. Bradley called a meeting of the JCS on the same day as the letter's release. Sherman wrote that he advised Bradley to, "oppose acting on a letter to a Congressman."⁵³ Apparently, the remaining chiefs concurred with Sherman and Bradley that MacArthur's actions did not warrant his dismissal. Truman met the next day with Marshall, Bradley, Acheson, and Ambassador Averell Harriman. In a memorandum prepared weeks later for the congressional hearings, Bradley wrote that both he and General Marshall recommended against MacArthur's relief.⁵⁴ Not only did Bradley feel that a charge of insubordination would be hard to prove, he claimed that he did not want to politicize the JCS by involving it in such a decision. In his memoirs, Bradley even alludes to his impending retirement as a factor in his decision. At this point in his career, Bradley did not wish to become embroiled in a bitter political fight.⁵⁵ He recommended that Marshall write a personal letter to MacArthur explaining the severity of the situation. The two men attempted to draft a letter, but it was never sent.⁵⁶

Over the weekend, the JCS met several times to discuss the incident and its repercussions. By this time, it was clear that Truman intended to dismiss MacArthur. Bradley wrote that the JCS agreed that MacArthur should be relieved, but that since "the military considerations were only a small part of the question involved . . . they would refrain from making a specific recommendation to the President for the relief of General Douglas MacArthur." The chiefs maintained that MacArthur "indicated that he was not in entire sympathy" with the government's policies. In addition, they contended that if MacArthur were

United States Military Academy Library, West Point, NY. General Bradley's appointment diary for Thursday, 5 April 1951 lists a phone call from the assistant secretary of defense regarding the plan to read the letter the following day to Congress.

⁵³ Sherman memo, 20 April 1951, Papers of Forrest Sherman. Sherman obviously did not believe the letter warranted the dismissal of a general during wartime.

⁵⁴ Omar Bradley to Forrest Sherman, Memorandum, 1951 (?), Papers of Forrest Sherman.

⁵⁵ Bradley, *A General's Life*, 631-4.

not relieved then it could be charged “that civil[ians] no longer controlled the military.”⁵⁷ On 11 April 1951, a message was sent to the Far East relieving MacArthur of his duties as CINCFE and CINCUNC.⁵⁸

With MacArthur’s dismissal, the chiefs seemed to be taking the easy way out. They stated that MacArthur should be fired from a military point of view, not due to insubordination, but because he “was not in entire sympathy with the policies” of the government. In the memo, written for the congressional hearings, Bradley stated that “there is little evidence that General MacArthur ever failed to carry out a direct order of the Joint Chiefs, or acted in opposition to an order.”⁵⁹ Clearly the fact that the JCS sent repeated directives to MacArthur, even if not stated in forceful terms, indicates that he did not always follow the wishes of the JCS.

Additionally, the fact that the chiefs provided several reasons as to why they felt Truman could relieve MacArthur is also important in understanding the actions of the JCS. The chiefs stated that they agreed with Truman. Bradley’s memorandum also made a point to mention that the Joint Chiefs avoided making a specific recommendation. This statement can be evaluated by historians in different ways. First, the chiefs implied that they believed MacArthur should be removed from his command but realized that their opinion was only a small part of what would ultimately be Truman’s decision. The second interpretation of this episode is that the Joint Chiefs did not agree that MacArthur’s actions warranted his relief, but that they would support the president’s decision publicly.

⁵⁶ Omar Bradley to Forrest Sherman, Memo, 1951 (?), Files of Forrest Sherman.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Chairman JCS to CINCFE, Redline, 11 April 1951, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A timing mistake meant that this message did not reach MacArthur before he heard it via the media. This would cause quite a bit of embarrassment for Truman. James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume III*, 595-8.

⁵⁹ Omar Bradley to Forrest Sherman, Memo, 1951 (?), Files of Forrest Sherman.

This second conclusion, although not provable, can be supported with the various events which occurred during the days leading up to MacArthur's dismissal. The fact that several members of the JCS stated that the General's actions, while inappropriate, did not merit such a stern reaction supports this claim. Also, the fact that Bradley and Marshall even considered sending a personal warning to MacArthur reveals they realized Truman's intentions to fire him, but still believed the situation could be salvaged with MacArthur's command intact. It was only after several meetings over the weekend that the members of the JCS came to realize that Truman was dead set on removing the argumentative general.

The relief of General MacArthur and the appointment of Ridgway to command the U.N forces in Korea was the result of months of disagreement over the direction of U.S. military and political policy with regards to Korea and China. What had seemed to be an unqualified success in October soon turned into a potential Third World War with the intervention of Chinese troops. This prospect alarmed officials in Washington, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and forced them to reevaluate the mission in Korea. General MacArthur argued that increased pressure against China would force their withdrawal from Korea; he did not believe it would precipitate a larger conflict. On the other hand, President Truman remained committed to keeping the war limited to Korea.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff found it necessary to present options to the President while at the same time keeping MacArthur aware of his responsibilities. They faced opposition with regards to both responsibilities. The Joint Chiefs often argued with representatives from the State Department over military matters even when basic political questions, such as the ultimate outcome in Korea, remained unanswered. Additionally, in General MacArthur, the JCS had a subordinate commander who believed he knew better than his superiors. With the intervention of

China, hopes for a sudden victory by the U.S. led forces evaporated. MacArthur became increasingly vocal and argumentative about the war he wanted to fight versus the war he was allowed to fight. However, the Joint Chiefs repeatedly took a passive approach towards MacArthur, never once seriously chastising him for his outbursts. Ultimately it was not the Joint Chiefs who took action against MacArthur, but President Truman.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The relief of General MacArthur represented the culmination of several failures by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to properly exert their authority within the National Military Establishment. Essentially, they allowed a theater commander to openly challenge the policies of the United States government. MacArthur repeatedly expressed his displeasure with the war in Korea, and the Joint Chiefs never admonished him for it. By not taking a more forceful stand with MacArthur, the Joint Chiefs failed to check, and possibly even passively encouraged, his disobedience.

An important aspect to this difference of opinion proved to be the lack of clear communication that existed between the Joint Chiefs and MacArthur. A major cause of this ambiguity resulted from the decision making process of the JCS as a body. The unanimous conclusions reached by the Joint Chiefs often allowed room for MacArthur to challenge his orders. Throughout the war, as the overall strategic goals continuously changed, the Joint Chiefs neglected to send MacArthur explicit instructions regarding his mission. Instead, they inserted conditional phrases and cautionary suggestions which the general never failed to take advantage of. In response, the JCS often inquired as to his reasons for such actions, but rarely countermanded MacArthur's orders. The most glaring example of such a reaction by the JCS involved the issue of troop dispositions as the U.N. forces approached the Yalu River.

Another factor which hindered communication between the Joint Chiefs and the CINCFE was the organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff itself. The system of employing executive agents often proved problematic when combined with the unanimous decision making process of the JCS. As the Army chief of staff, General Collins personally met with MacArthur more than any

of the other chiefs. Based on his testimony and memoirs, Collins was perhaps the most sensitive of the chiefs to MacArthur's situation in Korea. Due to this empathy, Collins often left the U.N. Commander with a sense of optimism regarding his requests and proposals.

The Joint Chiefs also faced difficulties in fulfilling their role as military advisors to the President. Due to the threat of the Korean conflict expanding into a larger war, President Truman often sought advice from the State Department regarding military operations as often as he received recommendations from the JCS. The rising influence of the secretary of state forced the Joint Chiefs to compromise on several issues. Most glaringly, it was Secretary of State Dean Acheson who argued strongest for intervening in the aftermath of the North Korean invasion. The Joint Chiefs felt South Korea was not worth risking a Third World War over.

The change of command did not automatically transform the situation in Korea. After MacArthur's dismissal, the Korean conflict slowly devolved into a stalemate while both sides attempted to negotiate a cease-fire agreement. From 1951 to 1953, the Chinese resisted making any concessions to the U.N. delegates to the peace conference. When General Ridgway took over as CINCFE, he expressed dismay at the seemingly contradictory directives just as MacArthur had. Like MacArthur, he sought clarification from the Joint Chiefs, but in a much more tactful manner.¹

Additionally, as the war continued with no real headway made, members of the Joint Chiefs seemed willing to enact some of the very measures advocated by MacArthur. General Vandenberg, weary of the stalemate, advocated strategic bombing of Chinese industrial areas, as well as a naval blockade of the Chinese coast. This change in attitude occurred due to Vandenberg's consternation at a prolonged war with no real end in sight. In short, Vandenberg

¹ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 298-305. Collins believes that Ridgway, as a former deputy chief of staff, was more familiar with the workings of the JCS, thus better able to communicate his uncertainties.

came to accept MacArthur's earlier belief that increased pressure against China would force them to capitulate. If the U.S. would not fight aggressively towards the Chinese, it should withdraw from Korea. Vandenberg came to this conclusion after he realized that China feared an all-out war as much as the United States did. Like MacArthur, Vandenberg did not want to commit to total war, but he did support stronger measures against China.² Finally in 1953, after President Eisenhower offered veiled threats of a nuclear response, the stalemate and the war ended with a cease-fire.

Although the Korean War continued for two years after the relief of General MacArthur, the debate over the proper role and organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff persisted for the next several decades. Several of the chiefs realized that the JCS had not functioned as cleanly or effectively as it should have, although they disagreed on how to change it.

General Collins believed that the basic structure of the JCS as it stood during the Korean War was sound, and would benefit from only a few minor changes. Breaking with the prevalent Army theory of unity of command, Collins writes that he did not feel that a single chief of staff to the secretary of defense would improve the JCS. He wanted to see the Joint Chiefs retain their legislated powers, but improve the efficiency of their offices. He writes that, "The Chiefs are extremely busy men, but that they can be spelled in their duties and relieved of many minor matters by the proper organization of their service staffs."³ Thus, to Collins, the failure of the JCS was not due to any inherent flaw in its design, but rather the problem caused by inadequate use of resources and personnel.

Vandenberg, on the other hand, saw serious defects in the JCS and proposed radical change. In a memorandum detailing his feelings on the matter, he wrote:

² Meilinger, *Hoyt S. Vandenberg: The Life of a General*, 187-9.

³ Collins, *War in Peacetime*, 370-7.

It is my view that the statutory organization of the Department of Defense and the Defense Establishment, and the procedures and relationships which have developed make impossible the achievement of maximum security for the dollars spent. . . . In my opinion it is not obtainable unless certain defects to which I have referred before the Committee are made the subject of corrective action.⁴

Vandenberg recommended three possible courses of action which might streamline the operation of the JCS. His first recommendation was the creation of a chief of staff of the Armed Forces. This chief of staff would be a member of the JCS, but unlike the current chairman, would have decision making powers. Vandenberg's second possible course of action was to have the President clarify the duties and responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He hoped that this would result in a decrease in the duplication of effort present within the services. Vandenberg's final proposal was the creation of the office of chief of staff to the president. This person would, in time of war, become the chief of staff of the Armed Forces and exhibit authority over the entire military.⁵

President Eisenhower also sought to change the structure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during his presidency. The Defense Reorganization Act of 1953 attempted to strengthen the chain of command between the Secretary of Defense through the individual service secretaries. The act also strengthened the office of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by granting him the authority to approve all appointments to the Joint Staff. In addition, the secretary of defense was now responsible for designating a service to act as the executive agent.⁶

⁴ Vandenberg, Memorandum for the Committee on Department of Defense Organization, 3 April 1953, Papers of Hoyt S. Vandenberg.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cole, *The Department of Defense*, 151-2, 157-8.

These changes, although strengthening the powers of the chairman, effectively took the JCS out of the operational chain of command.⁷ As a joint body, the JCS existed outside the domain of the service secretaries. During the Korean War, the JCS reported to the secretary of defense, leaving the individual secretaries with little formal responsibilities beyond budgetary issues. After the 1953 reforms, with powers of command running through the secretaries, the service chiefs retained command authority, but only as individuals, not as members of the Joint Chiefs.

The end result of the 1953 reorganization proved to be as muddled and ineffective as the original system had been. Dissatisfied with the results, Eisenhower attempted again to improve the efficiency of the Department of Defense in 1958. This new plan for organization removed the JCS and the service secretaries completely from the chain of command. With the changes, authority ran from the president to the secretary of defense directly to the unified commands, with the JCS acting as the method of communication between the civilian authorities and the military.⁸ While still retaining planning responsibilities within their own branch of the military, the Joint Chiefs of Staff moved closer to a pure advisory role to the president and secretary of defense.

As the principle military advisors to the president, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to experience difficulties performing their duties. During the Vietnam War, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have been criticized for failing to provide the president with their honest opinions regarding the direction of the war. McMaster notes that this resulted from the interservice rivalries of the

⁷ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 137; Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 320-1.

⁸ Cole, *The Department of Defense*, 175-218; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 137.

chiefs, their marginalization by both the president and the secretary of defense, and also a reluctance to directly challenge the strategic views of their civilian superiors.⁹

The Nichols-Goldwater Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 attempted to rectify the remaining problems with the military establishment, and in particular the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The act named the chairman of the Joint Chiefs as the sole military advisor to the president, not the JCS as a group. Also, the Joint Chiefs were removed from all operational duties in order to fully devote themselves to strategic policy planning.¹⁰

The difficulties experienced during the Korean War by the Joint Chiefs were in part due to their inability to reconcile their command duties as the senior ranking members of the nation's armed forces with their assigned roles as military advisors to the President of the United States. Responsible for thinking tactically, strategically, as well as politically, the JCS members often found themselves unable to do all three simultaneously. Their subordinate, General Douglas MacArthur, further complicated the situation by constantly challenging the direction of the war effort. The successive attempts to reform the Joint Chiefs of Staff illustrate the recognition by Presidents and members of Congress that the body as legislated in 1947 proved to be seriously flawed.

⁹ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1997).

¹⁰ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 140-1; William Lynn and Barry Posen, "The Case for JCS Reform," *International Security* vol. 10, no. 3 (Winter, 1985-1986): 69-97; Gordon Lederman, *Reorganizing the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).

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