

*Historical Security Council
(HSC)*



*The Korean Peninsula
After the 1953 Armistice:
International Security,
Post-War Reconstruction,
and the Political Future of
Korea in a Polarized World*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Historical Security Council simulates the United Nations Security Council at a pivotal moment in history: 1953 to 1954, in the immediate aftermath of the Korean Armistice. Delegates must strictly adhere to the political, technological, and diplomatic constraints of this era, representing their assigned government's foreign policy as it existed at the time. Crucially, referencing events or developments that occurred after this period is prohibited, requiring delegates to engage with history authentically rather than applying modern knowledge.

Established by the UN Charter in 1945, the Security Council holds the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Under Chapter VI, it can investigate disputes and recommend peaceful solutions. More powerfully, under Chapter VII, it can authorize binding enforcement measures, including the use of force. However, this power is checked by a fundamental rule: each of the five permanent members, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Republic of China (then based in Taiwan), and the Soviet Union, possesses an absolute veto over any substantive resolution.

This veto power is the central structural reality shaping the committee's work on the Korean problem. The Soviet Union's absence from the Council in June 1950, due to its protest over the exclusion of the People's Republic of China, allowed resolutions authorizing intervention in Korea to pass. Since the Soviet return in August 1950, all significant Security Council actions have been constrained by great power disagreement.

II. HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

2.1 Korea Before the War: Colonial History and Division

To understand the Korean War and its aftermath, it is necessary to begin with Korea's experience under Japanese colonial rule. From 1910 to 1945 forms the essential backdrop to everything that follows. Over 35 years, Japan dismantled Korean political institutions, suppressed the Korean language, extracted its resources, and subjected its population to forced labor and sexual slavery on a massive scale, a history that continues to shape every political dynamic on the peninsula, including Korean governments' relationships with Japan, with the great powers that tolerated colonialism, and with each other.

When Japan surrendered in August 1945, Korea was liberated but immediately divided. American and Soviet planners hastily agreed on the 38th parallel as a temporary administrative boundary for accepting Japanese surrenders, with no intention of making it permanent. However, the emerging Cold War quickly transformed this provisional line into a deepening political fault, as each occupying power began building a Korea in its own image. In the north, Soviet forces backed Kim Il-sung, a Korean communist who had served in the Red Army, while in the south, Americans supported the return of Syngman Rhee, a fiercely anti-communist nationalist long exiled in the United States. Both men claimed to represent all Koreans and were committed to reunification on their own terms, while remaining deeply dependent on their respective great power sponsors.

A UN attempt to hold all-Korea elections in 1948 collapsed when the Soviet Union blocked the commission's access to the north, leaving elections to proceed only in the south. This produced the Republic of Korea under Rhee on August 15, followed by the Soviet-backed establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under Kim Il-sung on September 9. Two mutually hostile states now existed, each claiming sole legitimate authority over the entire peninsula and each backed by a superpower, making the path to reunification extraordinarily fraught from the very beginning.

2.2 The Korean War, 1950–1953

On June 25, 1950, the Korean People's Army launched a massive, coordinated invasion across the 38th parallel. Within days, Seoul had fallen. The scale and speed of the offensive,

involving over 100,000 troops, artillery, and Soviet-supplied T-34 tanks, left little doubt that this was a deliberate, planned military operation rather than a border skirmish. The question of whether Stalin authorized or encouraged the invasion has been debated by historians for decades; declassified Soviet-era documents suggest that Kim Il-sung sought and received Soviet approval, though Stalin's level of direct involvement in planning the operation remains contested.

The United States, under President Harry Truman, immediately interpreted the invasion as a Soviet-backed test of American resolve, a challenge that, if not met, would signal to Moscow and to American allies worldwide that the United States would not defend its commitments. Truman ordered American military forces to support South Korea and brought the matter to the Security Council. With the Soviet Union absent, the Council passed Resolution 82 (June 25) calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of North Korean forces, and Resolution 83 (June 27) recommending that member states provide military assistance to the Republic of Korea. Resolution 84 (July 7) established a unified command under US leadership and authorized the use of the United Nations flag.

The war went through several dramatic phases. In the first months, North Korean forces pushed UN and ROK forces into a small defensive perimeter around the port of Pusan in the far southeast. General Douglas MacArthur's audacious amphibious landing at Inchon on September 15, 1950, cut North Korean supply lines and triggered a rapid UN advance. By late October, UN forces had crossed the 38th parallel and were advancing toward the Yalu River, the border between Korea and China. MacArthur believed Chinese threats to intervene were a bluff. He was catastrophically wrong.

Chinese People's Volunteer Army forces, officially described as volunteers to allow Beijing to avoid formal acknowledgment of state-level participation, began crossing the Yalu River in late October 1950. By late November, massive Chinese offensives had overwhelmed the extended UN forces. The retreat was brutal and costly; the Chosin Reservoir campaign became one of the most savage engagements in US Marine Corps history. Chinese and North Korean forces recaptured Seoul in January 1951. UN forces retook Seoul in March. The war stabilized roughly along the 38th parallel, and from mid-1951 onward, it became a war of position, grinding, costly, and indecisive, punctuated by bitter battles for hills and ridgelines

whose names would become synonymous with sacrifice: Heartbreak Ridge, Bloody Ridge, Pork Chop Hill.

Armistice negotiations began at Kaesong in July 1951 and moved to Panmunjom in October 1951. They would continue for two years, with the fighting going on throughout. The negotiations were extraordinarily difficult, complicated by disputes over the location of a ceasefire line, the composition of a supervisory commission, and above all the question of prisoner-of-war repatriation. The United States insisted on voluntary repatriation, giving each prisoner the right to choose whether to return home. The communists insisted on forced repatriation of all prisoners, as required by the Geneva Conventions. The voluntary repatriation issue consumed more than a year of negotiations; ultimately, a compromise formula involving a Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, proposed largely through Indian diplomatic initiative, broke the deadlock.

The death of Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1953, reduced Soviet pressure on the Chinese and North Koreans to continue fighting. The new Eisenhower administration, which had campaigned on ending the Korean War, signaled through various channels, including, reportedly, hints about the possible use of nuclear weapons, that it sought a rapid conclusion. The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953. President Syngman Rhee, furious at what he considered a betrayal, refused to sign. The armistice was signed by representatives of the UN Command, the Korean People's Army, and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army.

2.3 The Armistice Agreement: Terms and Significance

The Korean Armistice Agreement is a document of considerable legal and political complexity. Its principal provisions are as follows. First, it established a Military Demarcation Line (MDL) roughly corresponding to the line of contact at the time of signing, not precisely the 38th parallel, but close to it in the west and somewhat north of it in the east, reflecting the fluid nature of the front line. Second, it created a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) extending 2 kilometers on each side of the MDL, a total width of approximately 4 kilometers. The DMZ was to be a buffer separating the armed forces of both sides. Third, it established a Military Armistice Commission (MAC) composed of senior officers from both sides, charged with supervising implementation of the agreement and resolving alleged violations.

Fourth, it created the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), composed of representatives from Sweden and Switzerland (nominated by the UN side) and Poland and Czechoslovakia (nominated by the communist side), tasked with inspecting designated entry ports for the introduction of reinforcements and war materials. Fifth, it provided for the exchange of prisoners of war, including the establishment of a Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), chaired by India, to handle the complex question of prisoners who refused repatriation.

The armistice also contained, in its final article, a crucial provision: it called for a recommendation that "a political conference of a higher level of both sides be held by representatives appointed respectively to settle through negotiation the questions of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, etc." This political conference, the mandate for which expires within 90 days of the armistice signing, is what this committee must work to define, convene, and, if possible, render productive. The armistice did not end the war. It suspended the fighting. The Korean War remains legally ongoing. Every provision of the armistice is provisional pending this political settlement.

2.4 Human and Material Costs of the War

Any serious engagement with the Korean problem must begin with an honest accounting of what the war cost. The figures are staggering. Military deaths across all belligerents are estimated at between 900,000 and 1.2 million, including approximately 36,500 Americans, around 137,000 South Koreans (with far higher total ROK military casualties including wounded and missing), and Chinese People's Volunteer Army losses estimated by various sources at between 180,000 and 400,000 killed. North Korean military deaths are estimated at between 215,000 and 400,000. Civilian deaths are far harder to calculate precisely, but most serious estimates suggest between 2 and 3 million Korean civilians were killed, the vast majority of them in the north, which bore the brunt of the most intensive aerial bombing campaign since the Second World War.

The physical destruction of the Korean peninsula, and particularly of North Korea, is almost incomprehensible. American air power conducted a campaign of strategic bombardment designed to destroy North Korea's industrial capacity, transportation

infrastructure, and population centers. By the end of the war, American commanders acknowledged that there were essentially no more significant targets remaining in North Korea, the country had been reduced, in significant measure, to rubble. The capital Pyongyang was virtually leveled. Every major city in the north had been severely damaged. Industrial facilities, bridges, railways, and power infrastructure had been systematically destroyed. Historians and strategic analysts would later describe the campaign as one of the most destructive in air power history, rivaling the strategic bombing of Germany and Japan in the Second World War. South Korea, though less systematically bombed from the air, suffered the devastation of the ground war: Seoul changed hands four times, being captured, liberated, and fought over repeatedly, with enormous destruction of the urban fabric.

The social dislocation was equally catastrophic. An estimated 10 million Koreans, roughly a third of the total population, were separated from immediate family members by the partition. Millions fled south as refugees from the advancing communist forces; many others were displaced internally within each zone. The experience of forced separation, never knowing whether a parent, sibling, or child was alive on the other side of the DMZ, would become one of the defining traumas of modern Korean history, persisting across generations.

III. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 The Peninsula in the Aftermath of the Armistice

The armistice was signed on July 27, 1953. The committee convenes in the months that follow, a period of profound uncertainty, fragile calm, and intense diplomatic positioning. The guns are silent, but the fundamental questions that produced the war have not been answered. Both Korean governments remain formally committed to reunification under their own terms. Both retain large, battle-hardened militaries along a heavily fortified line of demarcation. Both are utterly dependent on the material, economic, and political support of their respective great power patrons. Neither Korean government was a full party to the armistice, the ROK refused to sign, and its relationship with the armistice framework is antagonistic, which means the institutional arrangements for managing the ceasefire are contested from the outset.

In South Korea, the political situation is dominated by Syngman Rhee, who governs the country with an increasingly autocratic hand. Rhee's domestic legitimacy rests substantially on American backing and on the ROK's claim to be the sole legitimate Korean government recognized by the United Nations. His government's economy is shattered: agricultural production is severely disrupted, infrastructure is destroyed across wide swaths of the country, and the government's ability to provide basic services to a swollen population of refugees is strained to its limits. American economic and military aid, which will amount to hundreds of millions of dollars annually throughout the 1950s, is the essential lifeline. The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea, signed on October 1, 1953, and ratified by the US Senate in January 1954, formalizes the American security commitment: it pledges mutual assistance in the event of armed attack. Rhee lobbied intensively for this treaty as the price of his acquiescence in the armistice. American officials regard it as a double-edged commitment: it provides deterrence against renewed North Korean aggression, but it also constrains American freedom of action and ties Washington to whatever provocations Rhee might choose to undertake.

In North Korea, Kim Il-sung's government faces the challenge of rebuilding a country reduced to rubble. The political system is firmly consolidated under Kim's leadership; the Korean Workers' Party exercises comprehensive control over society, economy, and military.

Soviet and Chinese assistance is flowing in substantial quantities: Soviet technical advisors, industrial machinery, and material aid; Chinese labor brigades helping with reconstruction. The speed of North Korea's reconstruction, which will be remarkable by historical standards, owes much to this assistance and to the extraordinary organizational capacity of the centralized state. Militarily, the Korean People's Army remains large, well-armed, and battle-experienced. It retains the offensive capability that launched the 1950 invasion, though it also knows, from bitter experience, the cost of overextension and the power of American air and naval forces.

3.2 The Great Power Context

The Korean armistice did not occur in isolation. It was shaped by, and in turn shaped, the broader dynamics of the early Cold War, and those dynamics continue to evolve in ways that directly affect the Korean political settlement question.

In the United States, the transition from Truman to Eisenhower had direct consequences for Korean policy. Eisenhower campaigned in 1952 on the promise to end the war, flying to Korea before his inauguration in what became an iconic image of presidential seriousness. The Eisenhower administration's strategic doctrine, the "New Look" defense policy articulated by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, sought to reduce the cost of containment by relying more heavily on nuclear weapons and less on expensive conventional forces. "Massive retaliation", the threat of disproportionate nuclear response to communist aggression, was designed to deter aggression at lower cost while freeing resources for economic development. This doctrine has direct implications for Korea: it signals that the United States will not again be drawn into a costly, inconclusive ground war on the Asian continent, and it implies that any future North Korean aggression might invite a nuclear response. The ambiguity is deliberate.

In the Soviet Union, the post-Stalin succession struggle has produced a period of strategic uncertainty. Georgy Malenkov, who initially appeared to be Stalin's principal successor, has emphasized consumer goods production and peaceful coexistence with the West, articulating what some Western analysts see as an opportunity for reduced tensions. Nikita Khrushchev is emerging as an increasingly powerful figure within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, though the succession has not yet been fully resolved. The Soviet

Union tested a thermonuclear device on August 12, 1953, just two weeks after the Korean armistice, demonstrating a capability far more destructive than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. The strategic balance between the superpowers is shifting in ways that make any conventional military conflict on the peninsula carry the shadow of nuclear escalation.

In China, the People's Republic is consolidating its internal political and economic structure while managing the diplomatic consequences of its Korean intervention. China remains excluded from the United Nations, with the Republic of China government in Taiwan holding the permanent Security Council seat. This exclusion is a constant source of grievance and a fundamental obstacle to any UN-based solution that requires Chinese cooperation. The Chinese People's Volunteer Army remains in North Korea, Beijing insists this presence is essential for North Korean security pending a political settlement, while the United States and South Korea view it as an occupation force that must be withdrawn before any settlement can be considered final.

The Korean armistice also occurs within a broader pattern of post-colonial conflict and Cold War competition across Asia. In Indochina, France is fighting an increasingly desperate war against the Viet Minh independence movement, and the military situation continues to deteriorate with no clear resolution in sight. The parallel between Korea and Vietnam, both divided along arbitrary lines, both hosting superpower competition through proxy forces, is not lost on contemporary observers, and it shapes how many delegations approach the Korean political settlement question.

3.3 The Foreign Military Presence Problem

One of the most practically difficult issues in the post-armistice environment is the continued presence of large foreign military forces on the Korean peninsula. This presence is simultaneously a security guarantee for each Korean government and the single greatest obstacle to any negotiated political settlement.

The United States maintains approximately 300,000 troops in South Korea as of mid-1953. The Eisenhower administration is determined to reduce this commitment over time, the New Look doctrine is premised on reducing the cost of conventional force deployments, but any precipitous withdrawal would undermine deterrence, alarm the ROK government, and potentially invite renewed aggression. The sixteen other nations that contributed combat

forces to the UN Command, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Turkey, France, Colombia, Ethiopia, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium, the Philippines, and others, retain smaller contingents in various stages of drawdown.

The Chinese People's Volunteer Army, meanwhile, maintains a substantial presence in North Korea, estimated at several hundred thousand troops. China and North Korea insist that this presence is necessary precisely because of the continued American military presence in the south. The two foreign military presences are thus in a structural standoff, each used by the other side to justify its own continuation. Breaking this standoff, whether through simultaneous phased withdrawal, international guarantees, or some other mechanism, is one of the central practical challenges before the committee.

3.4 The Economic Reconstruction Challenge

Both Koreas need massive reconstruction assistance, but the political context makes any coherent international approach to reconstruction extraordinarily difficult. The United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) was established by General Assembly Resolution 410(V) on December 1, 1950, to lead reconstruction efforts. Its mandate covers both North and South Korea, but in practice its operations have been confined to the south, both because of access difficulties and because Western donor states have been unwilling to fund reconstruction of a communist-aligned territory. UNKRA has faced persistent funding shortfalls throughout its existence; pledged contributions have consistently fallen short of assessed needs.

In South Korea, American bilateral assistance has been the primary driver of reconstruction, supplemented by UNKRA contributions and a small amount of other bilateral aid. The ROK's economy will require sustained external support for years to come, its productive capacity has been severely reduced, its capital stock destroyed, and its labor force decimated by war casualties and displacement. The agricultural sector, the foundation of the pre-war economy, has been severely disrupted by landmine contamination, destruction of irrigation infrastructure, and population displacement.

North Korea's reconstruction is proceeding rapidly by comparison, driven by intensive Soviet and Chinese assistance and the organizational capacity of the centralized state. But the scale of destruction means that even rapid reconstruction will take years to

overcome. The industrial base, which was more developed than the south's, owing to Japanese-era investment in heavy industry in the north, has been largely destroyed and must be rebuilt essentially from scratch.

IV. UN ACTIONS

The United Nations' involvement in Korea is more extensive and more consequential than its involvement in any other conflict up to this point in the organization's history. It is worth reviewing this history in some detail, both because it shapes the legal and political context for the current deliberations and because it illustrates the strengths and limitations of collective security under the UN Charter.

The Security Council's June 1950 resolutions, Resolutions 82, 83, and 84, were made possible by the Soviet Union's absence. This creates a profound legitimacy problem that the communist states exploit at every opportunity: the UN Command, they argue, is not a genuine multilateral force but an American operation operating under a blue flag obtained through a procedural accident. The Soviet return to the Security Council in August 1950 ensured that no further binding resolutions on Korea could pass the Council without Soviet agreement, which was never forthcoming. The practical implication is that the UN Command has operated throughout the war under the authorization of those three 1950 resolutions, with no subsequent Security Council endorsement, a legally awkward situation.

The General Assembly's "Uniting for Peace" Resolution 377A, passed in November 1950 at American initiative, attempted to address this weakness by establishing a mechanism for emergency special sessions of the General Assembly when the Security Council is deadlocked by the veto. If the Security Council fails to act because of a veto, the General Assembly can convene within 24 hours and make recommendations, including for the use of force. The Soviets and Chinese regard this resolution as an illegal circumvention of the Charter's grant of primary responsibility for peace and security to the Security Council. Its use in Korea established a precedent whose legality and appropriateness remains bitterly contested.

The United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) was established by General Assembly Resolution 376 in October 1950. Its mandate is to develop and execute plans for unification of Korea and rehabilitation of its people. In practice, UNCURK has operated only in South Korea, the DPRK has refused to recognize its authority or grant it access. UNCURK's reports to the General Assembly have

documented conditions in South Korea and made recommendations for reconstruction assistance, but its unification mandate has been entirely unrealized.

The United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) has spent its existence struggling between an ambitious mandate and inadequate resources. Established to rebuild both Koreas, it has in practice been confined to the south, where it has competed with bilateral American assistance programs for influence and resources. The Agent General of UNKRA has repeatedly drawn attention to the gap between reconstruction needs and available funding. The committee must consider whether UNKRA's mandate should be modified, its funding increased, its authority expanded, or its mission redirected in light of the post-armistice situation.

The Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, chaired by India, represents one of the most creative diplomatic solutions to emerge from the Korean conflict. The NNRC's Indian leadership and the involvement of Sweden, Switzerland, Poland, and Czechoslovakia created a genuinely multinational body with at least some credibility on both sides. General K. S. Thimayya of India, the commission's chairman, has navigated extraordinarily complex political pressures from all sides with considerable skill. The commission's work demonstrates that neutral international institutions can play a valuable role even in intensely polarized Cold War contexts, a lesson with broader implications for Korean reconstruction and political settlement.

V. KEY POINTS

5.1 The Question of a Formal Peace Settlement

The armistice mandated a political conference to address, among other things, "the peaceful settlement of the Korean question." What does a peaceful settlement of the Korean question actually mean? At minimum, it means replacing the armistice, a temporary suspension of hostilities, with a formal peace treaty that ends the state of war. But the political prerequisites for such a treaty are extraordinarily demanding.

A peace treaty requires agreement on the fundamental political status of Korea. Does it recognize two separate Korean states, each with sovereignty over its respective territory? Or does it treat Korea as a single country temporarily divided, with a process for achieving reunification? The Republic of Korea's government, and the United States, insist that the United Nations' recognition of the ROK as the only lawful government in Korea (General Assembly Resolution 195, December 1948) forecloses recognition of the DPRK as a legitimate state. The DPRK and China reject this position entirely. A peace treaty that does not resolve this fundamental disagreement cannot be a genuine peace settlement.

A peace treaty also requires resolution of the security architecture question: what guarantees exist against renewed aggression once the armistice mechanisms, the Military Armistice Commission, the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission, are superseded? The ROK's security currently depends on American military presence and the Mutual Defense Treaty. The DPRK's security depends on Chinese and Soviet backing. Any peace treaty that reduces these guarantees must substitute something in their place. The options discussed in diplomatic circles include international guarantees by the great powers, a neutral status for a unified Korea, or a formal peace guarantee under UN auspices.

5.2 The Unification Question: Elections, Confederation, or Permanent Partition

The fundamental political question, whether Korea will be reunified and under what terms, underlies every other issue in this committee. There are essentially three broad approaches on the table.

The first approach is UN-supervised all-Korea elections. This is the position of the Republic of Korea and of the United States. Under this approach, elections would be held across the

entire peninsula, under international supervision, to elect a constituent assembly that would draft a constitution and establish a unified government. The ROK argues that this is the only genuinely democratic approach, the only one that gives all Koreans a free choice. Critics point out that this approach would almost certainly produce a ROK-aligned outcome, given that the south has a substantially larger population than the north and that the elections would be held under conditions likely favorable to anti-communist candidates. The DPRK and China reject this formula precisely because of this likely outcome.

The second approach is some form of negotiated confederation or joint arrangement. This model would involve direct negotiations between the two Korean governments, bypassing the UN framework, which the DPRK regards as inherently biased, to establish a confederal Korean state in which both existing governments retain autonomy over their respective territories while a joint body handles matters of common concern. The DPRK has proposed various versions of this approach at different times. The ROK rejects it because it would legitimize the Kim regime and abandon the principle of UN-recognized ROK sovereignty over all of Korea.

The third approach, which neither Korean government formally advocates but which reflects the practical reality of 1953, is the indefinite continuation of the status quo: two separate Korean states, separated by the DMZ, each pursuing its own development under superpower patronage, with the question of reunification deferred indefinitely. This is what has in fact come to pass historically, but in 1953 it is not yet a formally accepted outcome, indeed, acceptance of permanent partition would be politically impossible for either Korean government to publicly endorse.

5.3 Foreign Troop Withdrawal: Conditions and Verification

The question of foreign troop withdrawal is technically separable from the question of Korean political unification, but the two are deeply interlinked in practice. The DPRK and China argue that the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea is a precondition for any political progress, that no genuine political settlement is possible while American troops guarantee the ROK's existence. The United States argues that its forces will remain as long as necessary for South Korean security, that withdrawal is a consequence of a satisfactory

political settlement, not a precondition for it. This chicken-and-egg problem has no easy resolution.

Even if agreement in principle could be reached on eventual withdrawal, the practical mechanics would be enormously complex. How would withdrawal be verified? The NNSC, established to monitor armistice implementation, has already encountered significant difficulties in performing its assigned functions, access to sensitive military facilities has been restricted by both sides, and the commission is paralyzed by the political divisions between its Swedish-Swiss and Polish-Czech components. Any verification mechanism for troop withdrawal would require an international inspection regime with more authority and resources than the NNSC currently possesses.

The question of Japanese-based forces is an additional complication. American forces in Korea are backed by and logistically dependent on bases in Japan. The US-Japan Security Treaty, signed in 1951, gives the United States the right to maintain forces in Japan "to deter armed attack upon Japan." Even a complete withdrawal of American forces from Korea would not remove American military power from the region, it would simply relocate it to Japan. For China and North Korea, this is an unacceptable outcome: they demand not just withdrawal from Korea but a fundamental revision of the American military presence in the western Pacific.

5.4 Post-War Reconstruction and the Role of International Institutions

The reconstruction of Korea is both a humanitarian imperative and a political battleground. The humanitarian case is unambiguous: millions of people need food, shelter, medical care, and the restoration of basic infrastructure. Schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, agricultural systems, and industrial facilities must be rebuilt. This will take years and require resources far beyond what either Korean government can provide from domestic sources.

The political complexity begins with the question of whether reconstruction assistance should be conditional on political concessions. The United States and its allies have been unwilling to contribute to the reconstruction of North Korea precisely because doing so would strengthen a communist government that they regard as an aggressor. The DPRK and China, conversely, argue that international reconstruction assistance, if genuinely neutral, could help create conditions for political progress by reducing the economic

desperation that makes conflict more likely. The question of whether UNKRA can be given a meaningful role in North Korean reconstruction, and on what political conditions, is one of the practical decisions this committee must address.

A related question is the role of reparations. Korea suffered 35 years of Japanese colonial rule, the economic exploitation of which contributed significantly to Japanese development while retarding Korean industrialization in certain sectors. Japan has acknowledged no legal obligation to pay reparations to either Korean government; indeed, Japan does not maintain diplomatic relations with either the ROK or the DPRK as of 1953. The question of whether Japan should be required to contribute to Korean reconstruction, and through what mechanism, is one that several delegations in this committee will wish to raise.

The demining problem is a concrete reconstruction challenge that illustrates the broader difficulties. Both sides laid extensive minefields throughout the war, and the DMZ region in particular is one of the most heavily mined areas on Earth. Agricultural land cannot be restored to production; civilian infrastructure cannot be rebuilt; and the simple movement of people across former battle zones carries lethal risk. A coordinated international demining effort would require cooperation between forces that currently regard each other with deep suspicion.

5.5 Humanitarian Issues: Prisoners of War and Divided Families

The Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission is processing the remaining prisoner-of-war cases under the armistice framework. The issue of prisoners who refused repatriation, approximately 21,000 anti-communist North Korean and Chinese prisoners who chose not to return to their home countries, has been a major source of propaganda for both sides. For the United States, the refusals demonstrate the superiority of the free world over communist tyranny. For China and North Korea, they represent illegitimate coercion and the theft of their citizens. The NNRC's work is proceeding, but the political symbolism of each case is enormous.

Beyond the formal POW framework, there is the broader tragedy of divided families. An estimated 10 million Koreans are separated from immediate family members across the DMZ. Letters cannot be exchanged. Phone calls are impossible. People who fled south during

the war have no way of knowing whether parents, siblings, spouses, or children left behind in the north are alive. The North Korean government, by and large, does not acknowledge the existence of these families or their right to any information. The South Korean government has raised the issue repeatedly but has no mechanism for resolving it absent DPRK cooperation. Any comprehensive political settlement would need to address this humanitarian tragedy, but even confidence-building measures, modest exchanges, an information registry, limited correspondence channels, would require a level of trust and cooperation between the two governments that does not currently exist.

VI. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

6.1 A Comprehensive Political Conference

The first option is convening a Political Conference, as the armistice itself mandated. The historical Geneva Conference of 1954 addressed Korea alongside Indochina simultaneously, which created both opportunities and distractions. Key design questions remain open: who participates, whether the PRC should have a seat, and how the conference relates to UN authority. Progress on smaller humanitarian issues might be pursued independently of the harder political questions.

6.2 Korean Neutralization as a Model

The second option draws on the Austrian neutralization model, a unified, neutral Korea free of foreign bases, guaranteed by major powers. While conceptually appealing, it faces serious obstacles: Austria had a single pre-existing government to restore, while Korea has two deeply opposed ones, and the great-power consensus that made Austria possible simply doesn't exist for Korea.

6.3 Phased Troop Withdrawal with Verification

Third, a phased troop withdrawal framework could allow incremental progress without forcing either side into a politically unacceptable all-or-nothing outcome, provided a stronger and more credible verification mechanism replaces the current inadequate Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission.

6.4 UNKRA Expansion and Humanitarian-First Diplomacy

Fourth, a humanitarian-first approach would focus on reconstruction, family reunions, and defining to build goodwill and demonstrate cooperation's value, though critics argue this risks allowing permanent partition to solidify without ever addressing the core political questions.

6.5 Economic Interdependence as a Peace Strategy

Fifth, economic independence could create structural incentives against renewed conflict through joint zones and shared infrastructure. However, the two Koreas' structurally different economies and fundamentally opposed political systems make genuine integration extremely difficult to design without one side appearing to exploit the other.

6.6 UN-Guaranteed Armistice Zone and Buffer State Concept

Finally, a more radical solution that has been discussed in some diplomatic circles involves transforming the DMZ into an internationalized zone under UN authority, with an international peacekeeping force managing humanitarian activities and facilitating gradual political normalization, loosely analogous to the post WWII Free Territory of Trieste. However, it faces serious obstacles: neither Korean government would willingly accept the internationalization of territory each claims as its own, and achieving great-power consensus would be extremely difficult given the Soviet Union's constant veto threat.

VII. COUNTRIES INVOLVED

United States of America

Firmly committed to South Korea's security through the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty, the U.S. cannot accept any outcome that rewards North Korean aggression. While advocating for UN-supervised all-Korea elections, Washington faces internal pressure from Eisenhower's "New Look" policy to reduce costly overseas commitments, forcing it to navigate carefully between maintaining troop levels and appearing to abandon its ally.

People's Republic of China

Beijing's core objective is preserving a friendly buffer state on its northeastern border, preventing American forces from reaching the Yalu River. Operating outside the UN due to Nationalist Chinese representation, China will push through the DPRK and sympathetic delegations for immediate foreign troop withdrawal and will firmly oppose any UN-supervised elections or settlement that could produce a unified, pro-American Korea.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Focused above all on regime survival and legitimacy after the war's devastation, the DPRK demands unconditional foreign troop withdrawal as a non-negotiable precondition and rejects UN-supervised elections as biased. Pyongyang favors direct inter-Korean negotiations and seeks reconstruction aid free of political conditions or involvement from institutions it views as Western tools.

Republic of Korea

The most unpredictable actor, the ROK under Syngman Rhee ties its domestic legitimacy directly to unification on its own terms, making any compromise politically dangerous at home. Seoul will insist on UN-supervised elections as the only legitimate path forward, vehemently opposing anything that recognizes DPRK sovereignty or weakens the U.S.-ROK alliance, and will use all available leverage to resist outcomes that could be framed domestically as betrayal.

Soviet Union

Moscow approaches Korea primarily as a strategic contest, aiming to prevent a U.S.-aligned state on its Far Eastern flank while showcasing its revolutionary credibility. The USSR will use its Security Council veto to block Western-favored resolutions, fully back DPRK and Chinese positions on withdrawal and elections, and deflect reconstruction responsibility by framing the conflict as American imperialism.

Republic of India

As a credible non-aligned state, India seeks a genuinely neutral settlement framework, supporting all-Korea elections but insisting conditions must be demonstrably fair to all Korean political forces, a meaningful distinction from the American position. India will also champion an expanded UNKRA mandate covering reconstruction in the North, arguing that economic recovery on both sides of the DMZ is essential for lasting peace.

Japan

As the former colonial power and key rear base for U.S. operations, Japan's interests broadly align with the American strategic position. Tokyo will tread carefully on reconstruction discussions to avoid reopening questions of reparations and historical responsibility, though it may be open to economic cooperation with the ROK given the natural complementarity between Japanese industry and Korean reconstruction needs.

Republic of Türkiye

A committed NATO ally that contributed the third-largest contingent to the UN Command, Turkey will firmly back Western positions on elections, troop withdrawal linkage, and reconstruction. Drawing on its own experience with Soviet pressure, Ankara will emphasize the necessity of strong security commitments for front-line states and the dangers of yielding to communist expansionism.

Commonwealth of Australia and Canada

Both broadly aligned with Western positions but not rigidly identical to American ones, Australia and Canada are well-placed to play constructive bridging roles. Having each contributed military forces to the UN Command, both have direct stakes in regional stability and may offer more diplomatic flexibility than Washington or Seoul, particularly on reconstruction and confidence-building measures.

Republic of Indonesia and Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Indonesia, a founding voice of the Non-Aligned Movement, will resist superpower camp alignment and advocate for Korean self-determination, arguing that great power competition has prolonged the peninsula's division. Vietnam, itself facing a parallel crisis of division and foreign interference, will bring a uniquely personal perspective to the Korean question.

Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of the Philippines

Both close American security partners, Pakistan and the Philippines will generally support U.S. and ROK positions while seeking to demonstrate their value as multilateral contributors. The Philippines may bring a distinctive Southeast Asian perspective on regional stability and the dangers of power vacuums, while Pakistan will balance its Western alignment with its own preoccupations around India and the Kashmir dispute.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Islamic Republic of Iran

Neither country contributed forces nor hold strong direct interests in Korea, but both are significant Cold War actors. Saudi Arabia will align broadly with Western positions, while Iran, whose nationalist government was just overthrown in a CIA-backed coup restoring the Shah, will approach the committee with acute sensitivity to questions of sovereignty, self-determination, and great power interference in other states' internal affairs.

Federative Republic of Brazil, United Mexican States, and Argentine Republic

The three largest Latin American economies, these delegations participated marginally in the Korean conflict but carry significant weight in the UN General Assembly. Each has navigated Cold War alignment with varying discomfort, Mexico through its tradition of non-interventionism, Argentina through Perón's "Third Position," and Brazil through its own

independent diplomatic voice, and all will scrutinize whether UN involvement in Korea represents genuine collective security or American power in multilateral clothing.

Republic of South Africa, Italian Republic, and Kingdom of Spain

All three are Western-aligned states seeking to demonstrate their reliability and reintegrate into the international community after complicated wartime histories. South Africa, despite its apartheid system, contributed forces to the UN Command. Italy and Spain, still rebuilding international credibility after their Axis-era roles, will prioritize supporting multilateral institutions and Western positions as part of their broader effort to restore diplomatic respectability.

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