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Between the Blocs: India, the United Nations, and Ending the Korean War

Robert Barnes

This article demonstrates that India played a much-overlooked but significant role during the Korean War, seeking to use the United Nations (UN) to bring the conflict to a speedy conclusion. It first examines why India was in a unique position to influence events at the UN at this time before examining Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's efforts to find a compromise solution during different phases of the conflict. It concludes that, while the United States remained the dominant voice at the UN throughout the Korean War, at certain times India was able to play a constraining role. This impact was felt most notably during the crisis following Chinese intervention in November 1950 and with the passage of the Indian resolution in the autumn of 1952 that ultimately brought the conflict to an end.

During the Korean War (1950–53) the US State Department sent more correspondence to, and received more from, its embassy in New Delhi than it did from any other diplomatic outpost except those at the United Nations (UN) and London. Similarly, Britain corresponded with India more than any other country apart from the United States and more than with all its other Commonwealth partners combined. Communications between India and the other Commonwealth countries, particularly Canada, were also surprisingly frequent. Why was so much attention paid to India's views and actions? It was, in short, because of the unique role India played in seeking to use the UN to bring the conflict to a

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speedy conclusion. From the outbreak of hostilities to the cease-fire three years later, Jawaharlal Nehru, the near-exclusive voice in Indian foreign policy as both prime minister and minister for external affairs, was determined to prevent the UN from adopting a policy that might lead to the war's prolongation or escalation. Nehru, therefore, sought to use India's considerable influence to reconcile the two Cold War blocs' widely divergent positions on Korea and restore world peace. India's efforts to find a compromise solution failed more often than not and exacerbated tensions between New Delhi and the United States. Yet, on more than one occasion India did play a constraining role at the UN and ultimately found the elusive solution to the prisoners of war question, allowing for the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953.

Despite the significance of India's role at the UN during the Korean War, it has received scant attention over the past sixty years. Indeed, the only account focusing solely on India's experience at the world organization throughout the conflict remains Shiv Dayal's book, *India's Role in the Korean Question: A Study in the Settlement of International Disputes under the United Nations*, published in 1959 without the benefit of official records or genuine hindsight.¹ Even William Stueck's excellent *The Korean War: An International History*, while paying by far the most attention to India's role at the UN in the current literature, does not emphasize this aspect enough, preferring to focus on the major combatants.² In addition, of the numerous biographies written on Nehru, the vast majority only briefly touch on the Korean War, let alone the UN dimension.³

One issue that has stood in the way of research on India's role at the UN during the Korean War has been the lack of available sources. At the National Archives of India virtually all of the Ministry of External Affairs records relating to Korea remain closed. Likewise, at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Nehru's post-independence papers have restricted access. But these obstacles can be partially overcome. To begin with, the private papers of Nehru's sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, his close confidante and an important diplomatic figure herself in these events, are available and reveal much about the views and motivations of the Indian prime minister. Furthermore, as indicated above, a large volume of diplomatic correspondence exists between New Delhi, Washington, and the various Commonwealth capitals, as well as from the United States and Commonwealth delegations at the UN, outlining discussions with Nehru and his key representatives. This evidence is slightly secondhand in nature; however, when combined with the Indian documents that are available a relatively accurate picture of India's part can be painted.

Nevertheless, before this article examines India's role in bringing the Korean War to an end, it is essential to understand why India, in the early, deeply polarized Cold War, held a unique position that, at times, allowed it to influence debate at the UN. After all, India was not even three years old at the outbreak of the conflict. It also had extremely difficult domestic problems, a hostile Pakistan on its flanks, and the People's Republic of China (PRC)—a

potential threat—to its north. Still, India was the largest and most vocal Third World country not embedded in the emerging Cold War alliance structure, with Nehru the champion of anti-imperialism and neutralism. Thus, at the UN, India had much clout among what was known at the time as the Arab-Asian group. In the early days of decolonization, though, this pseudo bloc numbered just thirteen, lacked cohesion, and its members were wary of challenging American hegemony at the UN. Moreover, Pakistan, due to its hostility to India, and Indonesia, as a rival leader in the developing world, were often reluctant to follow India's lead.

Nehru's foreign policies also created friction with the United States. The Truman administration was extremely wary of India's neutrality, adopting a "with us or against us" attitude. Many of the anti-imperialist movements Nehru supported as nationalist, particularly in Asia, were viewed by Washington as Communist. The most relevant example of this is China. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC and had unsuccessfully called for Beijing to be seated at the UN in January 1950. At the same time, Washington considered the subcontinent of great strategic importance since it formed the land and sea bridge between the vital Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian theaters. The Truman administration therefore attempted to win Nehru over to the Western bloc and to build India into a bulwark against Communism. The prime minister willingly accepted US aid given India's domestic difficulties, but he remained firmly committed to neutralism.

Finally, India had become an integral part of the Commonwealth since joining the organization at independence. India's future within the organization had been uncertain given Nehru's anti-imperialist and republican beliefs. The other Commonwealth members, however, considered India too important—strategically, economically, and politically—to lose. And so in 1949, before India became a republic, the Commonwealth prime ministers agreed to the London Declaration, allowing the inclusion of members who simply recognized the British sovereign as the head of the Commonwealth of Nations, while also dropping the word "British" from the organization's title.

From India's perspective, Commonwealth membership was a mixed blessing. Nehru wanted to assert Indian independence, but the prime minister and most of the Indian governing elite were British educated, retained close cultural and personal ties with Britain, respected British liberal democratic traditions, and realized that India's shaky economy and external security were connected to the Commonwealth. Nehru also hoped to use the Commonwealth to India's diplomatic advantage. Commonwealth membership provided a means to soothe relations with Pakistan, boost India's international prestige, and spread its views on nonalignment to a wider audience. Most significantly, Nehru realized that the Commonwealth had leverage over the United States, especially at the UN, since Commonwealth members represented Washington's key strategic allies as well as the leading Third World voice. In addition, the United States found a united

Commonwealth difficult to ignore because of the moral authority it possessed due to its multiethnic composition and liberal democratic traditions.

As a result, nowhere did Nehru see India's influence being more pervasive than at the UN. The prime minister believed that India could play a decisive mediatory role at the world body, using its Commonwealth connections and nominal leadership of the Arab-Asian group to counterbalance the influence of the two Cold War blocs. The Korean War proved to be the perfect testing ground for these beliefs.⁴

OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES

The story of the outbreak of the Korean War and the UN response is a familiar one. Fighting erupted in the early morning of June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the thirty-eighth parallel into South Korea. When news of this invasion reached Washington, the Truman administration quickly decided to refer this matter to the UN Security Council. The US government planned to use its dominance of the UN Security Council to legitimize its policy, taking full advantage of the fact the USSR was boycotting the UN in response to the failure of the Security Council to admit the PRC six months earlier. For the most part historians have accepted that the United States had its way at the UN during the opening weeks of conflict. Yet the concerns of India, a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council at this time, did ensure that things were not entirely straightforward for the Americans.

Before the emergency session of the UN Security Council met, the US State Department had formulated a draft resolution which condemned North Korea's "act of aggression," calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of all North Korean troops from the thirty-eighth parallel. The US delegation did not expect any resistance to this proposal, but in discussions with the British delegation and the Indian permanent representative, Sir Benegal Rau, questions were raised over use of the term "act of aggression." They argued that it remained unclear, from the limited information available, whether all blame should be attributed to North Korea. Significantly, the Americans were prepared to bow to this pressure and substituted the phrase with "breach of the peace," a slightly lesser charge in the UN Charter, but one that did not restrict later retaliatory action.⁵ India, still, agreed to support the proposal to demonstrate its commitment to collective security and the draft resolution was adopted in the UN Security Council.⁶ This result delighted both the US and British governments since it implied Nehru was abandoning his neutral stance.

In fact, immediately after the adoption of this resolution Nehru began to worry about the implications of his support for the UN action, fearing Washington would use the Korean situation to justify aggressive moves against China. Nehru's fears grew when the US delegation proposed a second reso-

lution recommending “that the Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security to the area.”⁷ What is more, Truman announced that he would deploy the US Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait and that he would greatly increase US assistance to the French in Indochina. Consequently, when the UN Security Council met, Rau claimed he was unable to receive instructions and refused to vote. But this dissent could not prevent the adoption of the US draft resolution.⁸

Washington and London, nonetheless, were deeply concerned that New Delhi was returning to its neutralist position and made a concerted effort to win India’s retroactive support for the resolution. US ambassador to India Loy Henderson told Nehru that it had been necessary to act precipitously before North Korean forces were victorious.⁹ British High Commissioner Archibald Nye also warned that there was no room for neutrality when it came to aggression.¹⁰ In Washington, the same arguments were then presented to the Indian ambassador, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.¹¹ Under this intense pressure Nehru did eventually announce that he “accepted” the Security Council’s decision but only because the UN could not stand idly by in the face of aggression.¹²

Even so, tensions between India and the United States soared when the Truman administration drafted an additional proposal recommending UN members to make forces and other assistance “available to a unified command under the United States of America” and requesting “the United States to designate the commander of such forces.”¹³ On hearing of this plan, Nehru refused to support a proposal, which effectively gave responsibility for the military operation solely to the United States, especially since he feared that General Douglas MacArthur, whom Nehru considered a warmonger, would be made commander. Nehru thus called for the appointment of a non-American commander who would report directly to the UN Security Council.¹⁴ Moreover, Nehru hoped that concurrent, Indian bilateral proposals in Moscow and Beijing for an immediate cease-fire might bear fruit despite US opposition to these moves.¹⁵ But New Delhi was wary of blocking the establishment of a much-needed organizational structure for the collective security action it had previously supported. India abstained, rather than vote in opposition, and the Council narrowly adopted the resolution. Truman appointed MacArthur as commander-in-the-field the following day.¹⁶

Nehru was clearly exasperated by these decisions. He wrote to his sister claiming that he was already becoming weary of the Korean problem and questioned whether India had made the right decision to support the UN action in the first place.¹⁷ Nehru was then quick to announce that India would not send forces to Korea since it had limited resources and a small military, which it used purely for defense. India did, though, provide a field ambulance unit.¹⁸

Over the following weeks, debate in the UN Security Council ground to a halt. Moscow had ended its boycott, and the US and British delegations were content to wage a propaganda battle with the Soviets. In contrast, Nehru saw an

opportunity to mediate between the two superpower blocs to find a solution that would bring the war to an end.¹⁹ Rau thus suggested that a committee composed of the nonpermanent UN Security Council members consider all the proposals so far made on Korea. He argued that these members would be able to make a more reasoned evaluation of the problem since none of them had special interests in the peninsula.²⁰ Indian attempts at reconciliation, however, were quickly nipped in the bud by the permanent members. US secretary of state Dean Acheson argued that a committee of nonpermanent members would only delay bringing about North Korea's compliance with the existing UN Security Council resolutions, and that the most interested parties had to decide what to do regarding Korea.²¹ British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin concurred with this analysis and refused to let Commonwealth loyalties get in the way.²² The Soviets, as well, expressed little interest, and Rau grudgingly abandoned his proposal.²³

Clearly, then, the United States dominated the UN Security Council during the period following the outbreak of hostilities in Korea and easily shunned India's mediation efforts. But even though India was unable to constrain US policy, Washington gave some minor concessions to appease New Delhi's concerns and facilitate safe passage of the various American resolutions. Furthermore, Nehru had given an early indication that he was willing to challenge US hegemony at the UN if such action could facilitate a speedy end to the fighting.

CROSSING THE THIRTY-EIGHTH PARALLEL

With the UN Security Council firmly deadlocked, attention shifted to the UN General Assembly when its Fifth Session commenced in October 1950. The US government saw this move as an opportunity since it was confident it could dominate this forum without fear of the Soviet veto. Indeed, at this time the Western bloc, along with the Latin American countries that invariably voted with Washington, held a clear majority. But India also embraced the opening of the UN General Assembly. With its Third World and Commonwealth partners all present, Nehru hoped India could now fully exercise its influence in the UN.

The member states gathered in New York in the wake of MacArthur's daring amphibious landing at Inch'ŏn and the rapid turnaround in the UN's military fortunes. With victory over North Korea now a very real possibility, the question being asked was whether UN forces should be permitted to cross the thirty-eighth parallel and achieve the UN's political objective, dating back to 1947, of establishing an independent, democratic, and unified Korea. The Truman administration, working with the British, thus formulated a draft resolution calling for "all appropriate steps [to] be taken to ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea." This phrase first appears innocuous, but it effectively permitted UN forces to occupy the entire peninsula. The proposal then went on to recommend "that all constituent acts be taken, including the holding of elections, under the

auspices of the United Nations, for the establishment of a unified, independent and democratic government in the sovereign state of Korea.” It also resolved to create the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) to achieve these goals.²⁴

Nehru, nevertheless, was adamantly opposed to crossing the thirty-eighth parallel and achieving the UN’s political objective by force, arguing that this went beyond the mandate established by the UN Security Council.²⁵ At the root of Nehru’s response was a message he had received from Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai through the Indian ambassador in Beijing, K. M. Panikkar, warning that the PRC would intervene in Korea if UN forces entered the area contiguous to its border. Nehru firmly believed that these words had to be taken at face value.²⁶ The Indian delegation, accordingly, proposed the establishment of a subcommittee to find a compromise between the US draft resolution and the Soviet proposal for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of all foreign forces.²⁷

Acheson opposed any delay that would allow North Korean forces to regroup, put UN soldiers’ lives at risk, or endanger Korean unification. He also dismissed the Chinese threat as a “bluff,” believing MacArthur’s messages and military intelligence reports minimizing the risk of Chinese intervention over the word of Panikkar whom Acheson saw as sympathetic to Communism.²⁸ The Western bloc, therefore, voted against the Indian proposal, and it was narrowly defeated despite gaining widespread Third World support. India then abstained over the US and Soviet drafts in an effort to remain neutral. The UN firmly rejected the Soviet proposal, whereas the US resolution was overwhelmingly adopted.²⁹

Clearly India’s early efforts to prevent the UN General Assembly from adopting a dangerous policy and to reconcile the differences between the two blocs failed. The question is *why*. Essentially, the majority of UN members, including India’s Commonwealth partners, were unwilling to challenge US hegemony at a time when the war was apparently drawing to an end. Hence India could only draw on the support of its Arab-Asian allies. In addition, few countries took Beijing’s threat of intervention seriously given that the Chinese Civil War had just ended and the country lay in ruins. Nehru, however, in spite of the fact the UN General Assembly’s decision represented a serious blow to India’s prestige, was not deterred and he sought more than ever to use the UN to end the Korean War.

THE WINTER CRISIS

The UN offensive north of the thirty-eighth parallel commenced on October 8, 1950, and the North Korean defenders were overrun over the next fortnight. Meanwhile, Chinese forces had been crossing the Yalu River undetected from Manchuria. These forces made their presence first known on October 25 by sporadically attacking South Korean and UN units. These events marked the beginning of the greatest crisis of the early Cold War and, as such, historians

have lavished considerable attention on the three-month period that followed. But India's central role at the UN—opposing US calls to punish China that might have led to escalation—has again been largely overshadowed by studies on the friction between and within the two Cold War camps.

At the beginning of the winter crisis, when China's intervention still appeared limited, Washington's response in the UN Security Council was to simply call on Beijing to withdraw its forces.³⁰ Despite this surprising moderation, Rau first wanted clarification of China's objectives in Korea, suspecting that China had intervened solely to protect its borders, and submitted a draft resolution with Britain inviting a Chinese representative to meet with the Security Council. Acheson was reluctant to support this measure, but he instructed the US delegation to abstain from voting on the proposal, thereby allowing its adoption.³¹ Still, Beijing swiftly rebuffed this overture.³² Nehru was greatly alarmed by this negative response and feared that China now had more aggressive designs in mind.³³

These fears were soon borne out. By late November, two hundred thousand Chinese troops had crossed the border and begun to move south, routing the divided UN forces in North Korea. As a result, the US delegation openly accused Beijing of committing aggression in Korea and pressed for an immediate vote on its outstanding draft resolution.³⁴ The USSR, however, vetoed this proposal, while the Indian delegation abstained without comment, reflecting New Delhi's shock at the scale of China's intervention.³⁵

Subsequently, the US delegation demanded that the Korean debate be transferred to the UN General Assembly and expected to dominate this forum as it had done in October.³⁶ It clearly did not anticipate the widespread concern, most vocally expressed by India, that precipitate action risked escalation. In an attempt to stymie American moves, Rau tried to use India's good relations with the PRC to find out Beijing's motives for intervening in Korea through General Wu Hsiuchuan (Wu Xiujuan)—a Chinese representative who had recently arrived in New York to discuss Taiwan's future. Wu, nevertheless, remained cagey and simply demanded the immediate withdrawal of US forces from Korea.³⁷

In response, the US delegation submitted the same proposal that had been vetoed by the Security Council. But the Commonwealth delegations, urged on by Rau, feared that if the US proposal was adopted by the UN and then rejected by Beijing, the Truman administration would press for sanctions against the PRC. Consequently, the Commonwealth members agreed to formulate a rival resolution.³⁸ Nehru took up this mantle with greatest zeal and proposed a cease-fire at the thirty-eighth parallel and negotiations on Korea and Taiwan after the cessation of hostilities.³⁹ This proposal gathered considerable support, forcing Acheson to compromise. The US Secretary of State suggested the creation of a three-man committee to confer with the two military commands to determine the basis for a cease-fire.⁴⁰ The Indian delegation recognized the significance of this concession and convinced the twelve other Arab-Asian members to cosponsor a draft resolution incorporating Acheson's idea. The UN General Assembly adopted this

proposal with only the Soviet bloc voting in opposition.⁴¹ Furthermore, Rau was appointed as a member of the resulting three-man Cease-fire Committee.

Rau's first action was to again seek to discuss cease-fire conditions with Wu. But the Chinese representative remained uncommunicative and soon after returned to China making impossible any further negotiations through him.⁴² Next, Rau formulated with the Arab-Asian group another draft resolution recommending that directly interested governmental representatives meet immediately to make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of all outstanding East Asian issues.⁴³ Yet the US government would not agree to such a wide-ranging commitment until the fighting in Korea had stopped.⁴⁴

The crisis then deepened when Chinese forces crossed the thirty-eighth parallel on New Year's Eve 1951. In spite of these developments, Rau remained unperturbed and worked with his colleagues on the Cease-fire Committee to formulate a set of cease-fire "principles," including: an immediate cease-fire followed by the staged withdrawal of all armed forces from Korea; the creation of a political machinery whereby the Korean people could express themselves freely on their future; and affirmation that the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China would seek a peaceful settlement of all outstanding East Asian issues after the cessation of hostilities.⁴⁵

At the same time, Nehru tried to exercise his personal influence at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference held in London in early January 1951. He repeatedly pressed for a UN resolution calling for the settlement of all East Asian issues, arguing that China would accept nothing less. But most of the other prime ministers warned that Washington would only accept negotiations once a cease-fire had commenced.⁴⁶ In the end, Bevin sought to compromise by suggesting a resolution "disapproving" of Chinese intervention, calling for Chinese forces to be withdrawn, and for the great powers to meet to deal with issues threatening world peace. Nehru worried that this proposal was too vague but expressed his willingness to go along with the consensus view and support this plan.⁴⁷

Rau had also been working with the Cease-fire Committee to revise its principles. They now specified that negotiations on the questions of Taiwanese and Chinese representation at the UN would take place "as soon as a cease-fire had been agreed on."⁴⁸ Realizing the widespread support for these principles, Acheson again proved willing to compromise and instructed the US delegation to support them.⁴⁹ The Commonwealth prime ministers soon agreed to follow suit.⁵⁰ The UN General Assembly then approved the cease-fire principles by a large margin.⁵¹

This decision marked the end of Washington's willingness to make concessions. Beijing predictably rejected the cease-fire principles, the military situation continued to disintegrate, and the American public demanded action against China. Acheson formulated a draft resolution branding China an aggressor and calling for sanctions.⁵² India, however, was convinced that such action risked

escalation. Nehru wished to pursue a Chinese proposal transmitted by Zhou Enlai through Panikkar, effectively agreeing to a cease-fire as soon as a conference on all East Asian issues commenced.⁵³ Rau, thus, submitted a motion to adjourn the debate for forty-eight hours so that the clarifications could be scrutinized. Washington, in contrast, viewed the Chinese message as a ploy designed to delay the work of the UN. Even so, the UN narrowly adopted the Indian motion, demonstrating that the majority of members shared Nehru's fears.⁵⁴ During this adjournment, though, it became increasingly clear that the Chinese advance had halted. In this climate, India's Commonwealth partners, one-by-one, came to the conclusion that it was necessary to support the US proposal. Even Britain, India's closest ally up to this point, ultimately backed down once Washington agreed there would be a delay between China being branded an aggressor and the consideration of sanctions in order to allow for a final attempt to negotiate a settlement.

With this door closed, Nehru turned his full attention to his Arab-Asian partners. This group formulated a rival draft resolution calling for a conference along the lines suggested by Zhou Enlai. India then made a last-ditch effort to convince Acheson to drop this proposal with Ambassador Pandit, warning that it risked escalation.⁵⁵ These efforts, even so, were to little avail. The UN narrowly rejected the Arab-Asian proposal, while decisively adopting the US draft resolution. India now found itself in opposition alongside the Soviet bloc.⁵⁶

Once again India's conciliatory efforts had been unsuccessful. The UN had branded the PRC an aggressor and enacted sanctions. The risk of escalation was still a very real possibility. Nevertheless, India's attempts to prevent the UN from adopting a risky policy were not completely fruitless. India had united with its Commonwealth and Third World partners, forcing the Truman administration to prioritize attempts to bring about a negotiated cease-fire over punitive action. Also, as Stueck points out, pressure from India and other members had delayed action at the UN at a crucial juncture, since by the time the UN had adopted the aggressor resolution, the military crisis had abated and public, congressional, and administrative calls in the United States for retaliation against China had begun to subside.⁵⁷

THE INDIAN RESOLUTION

Immediately after the adoption of the aggressor resolution, India adopted a much more passive role at the UN. Nehru smarted from this defeat and had domestic concerns to worry about. In addition, despite his earlier fears, when it came to imposing sanctions upon the PRC, the United States pursued a relatively moderate course, and the UN General Assembly only recommended an embargo on the export of strategic goods to China. Moreover, the military situation in Korea continued to improve, and by the early summer of 1951 the front had stabilized

at the thirty-eighth parallel, and Armistice talks had gotten underway. A number of historians, most notably Rosemary Foot in *A Substitute for Victory*, have written detailed accounts of the tense negotiations that took place between the UN—represented by US military figures—and Communist negotiators during the second half of the Korean War. But India's efforts at the UN to find a compromise have been largely overlooked. The remainder of this article will redress this omission, since it was during this period that India made its most important contribution to ending the conflict in Korea.

Throughout the remainder of 1951 India shared the general optimism at the UN that the fighting would soon end, and Nehru chose to let the truce talks take their course. Consequently, when the UN General Assembly met at the start of 1952, the Indian delegation supported the US proposal to defer the Korean debate until a cease-fire had been signed. Yet India's patience soon ran out when the negotiations at P'anmunjŏm suddenly broke down over the issue of the postwar fate of prisoners of war. The UN negotiators, on Truman's instructions, championed "non-forcible repatriation," calling for only willing prisoners to be returned to their homelands. In contrast, the Communist side demanded that prisoners be exchanged on an "all-for-all" basis, with every former prisoner required to return to his home country. Matters were made worse when the UN Command screened the prisoners in its custody, finding that only seventy-three thousand out of approximately 170 thousand wished to return home.⁵⁸ The Indian embassy in Beijing made bilateral attempts to break the deadlock after Zhou Enlai had indicated that China would accept the return of one hundred thousand Communist prisoners, as long as this figure included all of the Chinese prisoners in UN custody. But these efforts proved fruitless.⁵⁹ Then in October 1952 the UN side unilaterally broke off the negotiations after the Communists rejected three new proposals.⁶⁰

It was in this context that Nehru launched his boldest bid to bring the Korean War to an end. He was determined to use whatever influence India had to find a compromise formula at the forthcoming UN General Assembly. To specifically represent his views on Korea he sent V. K. Krishna Menon, his close friend, staunch Indian nationalist, and former controversial high commissioner to Britain. To head the Indian delegation, Nehru selected his sister, Ambassador Pandit.⁶¹

The Truman administration, for its part, wanted the UN to simply demand that the Communists accept "non-forcible repatriation." Washington had formulated a draft resolution to this effect that was jointly sponsored by the other twenty countries that had contributed military or nonmilitary assistance to the Korean action, excluding India.⁶² Vitaly, though, two Commonwealth sponsors, Britain and Canada, realized that the US proposal would surely be rejected by the Communists. And, like India, they greatly desired to end the costly and distracting Korean War. The Indian delegation, therefore, decided to try to unite the Commonwealth members, and Menon suggested that a commission be established

to take custody of all nonrepatriate prisoners after the Armistice and to decide upon their final disposition. The other Commonwealth delegations supported this proposal, but they were still wary of openly challenging the United States.⁶³

Acheson was quick to denounce the Indian plan. He argued that it left unresolved the ultimate fate of nonrepatriate prisoners, leaving the Communists with a ready-made pretext for breaching the Armistice.⁶⁴ Nehru, all the same, was encouraged by reports coming from Beijing that China was willing to make concessions.⁶⁵ Buoyed by this news, Menon further elaborated his proposal for his Commonwealth colleagues and suggested that the commission to take custody of prisoners consist of representatives from Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland—the four “neutral” nations already accepted by both sides to supervise the Armistice—plus an umpire.⁶⁶

In the meantime, it had become clear that many other countries doubted the US-formulated 21-Power draft resolution described above. A number of Latin American and Arab-Asian members had informally suggested compromise solutions. Still, momentum behind Menon’s proposal quickly gathered pace due to events in the United States. On November 4, 1952, the Republican candidate, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, won a landslide victory in the US presidential elections due, in large part, to his call for an end to the Korean War and his vague election promise to visit Korea. This event proved vital in emboldening the Commonwealth members to join with the Arab-Asian group behind the Indian proposal. At the core of this united front was the shared trepidation that the next US administration, led by a former soldier under pressure from the Republican Right, would pursue a military strategy to end the conflict in Korea. These countries believed that such a course would at least prolong the conflict and potentially lead to its escalation. For that reason a genuine effort to solve the prisoners of war question had to be made before Eisenhower took office in January 1953 and while the outgoing President Harry S. Truman’s policy bore little weight at the UN.

In this climate, Menon worked extremely closely with the British and Canadian delegations to find a solution to the prisoners of war question that was acceptable to all. The end product was a revised version of his earlier proposal which consisted of two distinct sections. The first section was a lengthy preamble supporting the UN negotiators and the principle of non-forcible repatriation. The second substantive section listed seventeen proposals, the most important being the establishment of a repatriation commission to take custody of all prisoners at war’s end. Willing prisoners would be repatriated immediately. Over the following ninety days, representatives of the belligerent countries would then be permitted to try to persuade nonrepatriate prisoners to return home. If unwilling prisoners remained, their fate would be discussed for a further ninety days at the postwar political conference on Korea already agreed in principle by the negotiations at P’anmunjŏm. If still no decision could be reached, the final disposition of the prisoners would be decided by the UN.⁶⁷

While Menon's draft resolution immediately gained widespread support, Acheson refused to budge and personally campaigned to have the 21-Power draft resolution adopted. He targeted the other Commonwealth members but they were only willing to revise the wording of the Indian proposal to accommodate the two drafts.⁶⁸ Besides, up until this point disagreements had been largely kept private. This situation changed on November 19, 1952, when India, without warning either the United States or its Commonwealth allies, formally submitted its draft resolution.⁶⁹ Nehru decided to take this action since he was unwilling to bend any further to Washington's will, and since he believed it was better "to follow the right path" regardless of whether the proposal was adopted.⁷⁰ Acheson was furious with India for acting precipitately and warned the group of twenty-one states contributing to the action in Korea that if they were willing to compromise their principles to gain Asian support, the United States could not vote with them.⁷¹ Still, these members remained loyal to the Indian proposal, and Acheson asked and received Truman's permission to vote against it.⁷²

The US delegation did not, however, find it necessary to take this course. On November 24, Soviet foreign minister Andrei Vyshinsky made a scathing attack on the Indian draft resolution claiming it was based on the US policy of "forced detention" and warned that its adoption would only lead to the prolongation of fighting. Acheson immediately leapt at this opportunity to express publicly that the differences between the Indian proposal and the 21-Power draft resolution were linguistic rather than substantive.⁷³ So why was the US Secretary of State willing to concede after resisting the Indian proposal for so long? In short, Vyshinsky's statement allowed the United States to support the Indian draft resolution, in the belief that it would be rejected by the Communists. Acheson also held that great harm would be done to American global interests if the United States broke with its allies.⁷⁴

Nehru's reaction to Vyshinsky's statement was far more negative. He concluded that the Indian attempt at finding a compromise solution had failed and wrote to his sister, Ambassador Pandit, that "the world is determined to commit suicide." He added that the Indian proposal was too inclined toward the "UK point of view" and was critical of Menon for negotiating solely with the Commonwealth.⁷⁵ On hearing of Nehru's concerns, the US and other Commonwealth governments became gravely concerned that Menon would withdraw his draft resolution now that their views were in alignment. In an effort to prevent this happening they put considerable diplomatic pressure on India to stand firm. In this light, Nehru reluctantly accepted that the Indian proposal had to be voted upon given everything that had gone before.⁷⁶ Accordingly, on December 3, 1952, the UN adopted the Indian resolution with unanimous non-Soviet support.⁷⁷ The Chinese inevitably rejected its terms a week later.

Nehru's reflections on these events were ambiguous. The prime minister recognized that his initiative had miscarried, and he did not expect the Indian resolution to be implemented. Even so, he was pleased with the Indian stand

of uniting the Commonwealth and Arab-Asian group and forcing Washington to back down. Hence he was hopeful that India could play a similar role at the UN in the future. Nehru also believed that in the long-term the adoption of the Indian resolution would constrain Eisenhower's end-the-war strategy and prevent escalation.⁷⁸

Evidently, throughout the UN General Assembly session in the autumn of 1952 India did play an important role. The Indian delegation, especially Menon, had resolutely pursued a compromise solution to the prisoners of war question even if this created friction with the Truman administration. Yet the delegation had also demonstrated great flexibility, effectively working with its Commonwealth partners, and modifying the proposal in an attempt to make its terms acceptable to both sides. Most importantly, India, with the weight of international opinion behind it, had eventually convinced the US delegation, greatly weakened by domestic events, to adopt a policy divergent from its preferred course. Admittedly, Washington only agreed to drop its own proposal when it was convinced that the Indian resolution would have no further impact on the Korean question. But this concession was a significant climb down given the US dominance of the UN at this time. Furthermore, contrary to American thinking, the Indian resolution still had a major part to play in ending the conflict.

THE SIGNING OF THE KOREAN ARMISTICE AGREEMENT

Events beyond India's control finally led to the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement. Nothing New Delhi said or did could bring about the cessation of hostilities until the key belligerents themselves desired it. Unsurprisingly, therefore, studies of the final phase of the conflict have commonly scrutinized the policies adopted in, and the interactions between, Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. Traditionalists, such as David Rees, Edward Keefer, and Edward Friedman, argue that Washington's threats to use nuclear weapons in May 1953 effectively forced the Communists to accept a cease-fire or face an extension of the fighting. This viewpoint reflects the official line promulgated by the Eisenhower administration in the aftermath of the conflict in connection to its "New Look" strategy.⁷⁹ Rosemary Foot and Roger Dingman, on the other hand, question the importance of nuclear coercion. They argue that these threats were, at most, implicit; may not have even reached their intended audience⁸⁰; and were probably ignored by Mao Zedong who had very publicly described atomic weapons as a "paper tiger." These historians also stress that at the Armistice negotiations both sides had basically resolved the prisoners of war question before these threats were even made.⁸¹

In addition, Stueck has argued convincingly that Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, was the vital ingredient in ending the fighting. He stresses that Stalin's successors, realizing their domestic positions were far from secure and

facing the economic strain caused by the Korean War and rearmament, desired a reduction in Cold War tensions. As a result, they used Stalin's funeral to publicly announce a "peace offensive," starting with Korea. At the same time, both Kim Il Sung (Kim IIsǒng) and Mao now desperately desired an end to the fighting. The war had devastated North Korea and a cease-fire was needed for reconstruction, while China had expended considerable manpower and resources on Korea, resources better used for industrialization, without gaining either Taiwan or UN membership.⁸²

Yet over the winter of 1952–53 these developments were not known. With the cease-fire negotiations still in recess, Indian fears continued to mount that the Korean War could escalate under Eisenhower. Nehru, thus, quietly considered whether India should press the UN General Assembly to seek a new compromise solution by going further to meet the Communist position. But the Eisenhower administration, especially Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was determined to block any initiative at the UN that might interfere with military planning.⁸³ The US delegation, now led by Eisenhower's close friend Henry Cabot Lodge, concluded that the best course at the UN was to simply reiterate American support for the Indian resolution since this now appeared harmless. Lodge also realized that the United States had committed itself to this resolution and could not easily ignore a UN decision that had widespread international support.⁸⁴

When the UN General Assembly resumed in late February 1953, Washington was relieved to learn from Ambassador Pandit that India had nothing new to propose, given that neither the United States nor the Communists appeared to want to compromise.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Stalin's death and the announcement of the Soviet "peace offensive" starting with Korea soon electrified the atmosphere in New York. This initiative first manifested itself when the Communist High Command accepted an outstanding UN offer to exchange sick and wounded prisoners. Then, more significantly, on March 30, 1953, Zhou Enlai broadcast a radio statement proposing that all nonrepatriate prisoners—recognizing this category for this first time—be taken to a neutral country for six months while representatives from their homelands try to persuade them to return home. If there remained nonrepatriate prisoners at the end of this period their final disposition would be determined by the post-Armistice political conference on Korea. This proposal was unmistakably based on the Indian resolution and revealed that its terms might prove acceptable to the Communist side.

Nehru believed that this opening represented a genuine opportunity to end the Korean War. But Eisenhower and Dulles were wary of developments in Moscow and doubted the sincerity of the peace feelers. Accordingly, the mood of expectation at the UN, especially after Menon publicly praised the Chinese initiative, greatly alarmed Washington and the United States stressed that this could not be ignored. Dulles feared that an out-of-hand debate at the UN General Assembly could jeopardize the chances of rekindling full negotiations now that discussions on the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners had commenced.⁸⁶ Still, it proved

impossible to prevent discussion on Korea since the Polish delegation proposed an immediate cease-fire and the implementation of Zhou Enlai's proposal.⁸⁷ For India, this action presented another chance to use its influence to try to reconcile the views of the two blocs. Hence, Menon formulated a moderate draft resolution approving the negotiations at P'anmunjŏm—resumed following the agreement to exchange of sick and wounded prisoners in April—and urged the negotiators to conclude an Armistice as quickly as possible. The US delegation, however, felt even this went too far and submitted a rival proposal noting the recent agreement on the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners, expressing its support for an early Armistice, and adjourning the UN General Assembly until an Armistice had been signed or developments required further discussion.⁸⁸

Despite these tensions it soon became clear that the Indian and American positions were not far apart, and the US delegation agreed to merge the two proposals. The end product was a procedural draft resolution that noted

with deep satisfaction that an agreement has been signed in Korea on the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners of war . . . that the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners of war will be speedily completed and that further negotiations at Panmunjom will result in achieving an early Armistice in Korea; and decided to recess the current session upon completion of the current agenda items, and requests the President of the General Assembly to reconvene the present session to resume consideration of the Korean question (a) upon notification by the Unified Command to the Security Council of the signing of an Armistice Agreement in Korea; or (b) when, in the view of a majority of Members, other developments in Korea require consideration of this question.⁸⁹

Brazil then sponsored this draft resolution in the hope that the Soviet bloc would be less likely to vote against it than if it was submitted by the United States.⁹⁰ This tactic worked as the Polish delegation withdrew its proposal and the Brazilian resolution received unanimous support.⁹¹

Even though the Brazilian resolution was purely procedural, its adoption was significant in a number of ways. To start with, it marked the first time all the UN members had voted in favor of a resolution on Korea. It also clearly indicated that all the UN members agreed that the Armistice would best be decided by the negotiators at P'anmunjŏm. And crucially, the adoption of this resolution implied that all the member states accepted that the outstanding Indian resolution provided the answer to the prisoners of war question. This fact was demonstrated during the renewed Armistice negotiations in which the Indian resolution set the acceptable parameters for discussions.

Starting in early May, the Communist negotiators soon revealed their willingness to move further toward the terms of the resolution by proposing the establishment of a Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) composed of Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, and umpired by India. The Communists also conceded that nonrepatriate prisoners should remain

in custody in Korea and shortened the persuasion period to four months. In comparison, the UN negotiating position moved further away from the Indian resolution, since Eisenhower was under great pressure from the Republican Right not to make concessions. While accepting the NNRC concept, the UN side called for all Korean prisoners to be immediately released and for only Chinese nonrepatriate prisoners to be held for sixty days of persuasion before being automatically released. The Communist delegation gave this proposal the expected vitriolic treatment, but India and its Commonwealth allies especially also deeply criticized the United States. Under the weight of this external pressure, and after much deliberation, the Eisenhower administration accepted that the United States had to adhere to the Indian resolution even if this upset many Republicans.

In consequence, the UN negotiators tabled a new proposal conceding that all nonrepatriate prisoners be held in custody for ninety days for explanations. The final disposition of any remaining prisoners would be considered by the postwar political conference on Korea for a further thirty days. After this time the prisoners would either be released or handed over to the UN General Assembly. The Communists could choose. With the UN and Communist positions almost identical, the prisoners of war issue appeared to have been resolved before the United States threatened nuclear attacks. Yet it still took a further seven weeks before the fighting stopped due to South Korean President Syngman Rhee's (Yi Sŭngman) unilateral decision to release twenty-seven thousand prisoners, allowing them to escape into South Korean territory. During this time Nehru became increasingly anxious and pressed for the UN General Assembly to discuss Korean developments. Still, neither the United States nor the Communists would let Rhee's devious act get in the way now that a compromise had been found. The Korean Armistice Agreement was finally signed on July 27, 1953.⁹²

During the first half of 1953, the necessary conditions to end the Korean War were established with Eisenhower's election and Stalin's death. But these developments alone were not sufficient to end the fighting, since a solution to the outstanding prisoners of war question still had to be agreed. For that reason the Indian resolution provided the essential means to end the Korean War since its terms eventually proved acceptable to both sides, as it was borne out in the resumed Armistice negotiations. India's most important role in bringing the conflict to an end had thus taken place back in the autumn of 1952. Even so, India did further facilitate the signing of the Armistice Agreement in the spring of 1953. Nehru, acting through Menon, showed great patience and foresight resisting the temptation to push for further UN action and instead placed his trust in the negotiators at P'anmunjŏm. New Delhi then pressed both sides to move ever-closer to the Indian resolution, reprimanding Washington when it drifted from this course and criticizing Rhee's sabotage attempts. India must be given credit for nudging along the process toward peace.

CONCLUSION

India's involvement in the Korean question did not end with the cessation of hostilities. As umpire of the NNRC and provider of the custodial force to detain nonrepatriate prisoners, India encountered many problems and was much criticized by Washington and Seoul. Considerable debate at the UN also focused on whether India should participate at the postwar political conference on Korea. However, these issues are beyond the chronological scope of this article and do not detract from the fact that during the conflict years India played a unique role at the UN. Nehru and his representatives consistently sought to bring the Korean War to a swift conclusion, to prevent the UN from adopting a policy that might lead to its escalation, and to reconcile the divergent positions of the two superpower blocs. To achieve these aims, New Delhi hoped to use its influence as the leading Third World voice and as a member of the Commonwealth to unite these two groups as a counterbalancing force within the bipolar Cold War system.

This is not to say Nehru consistently achieved his goals. Throughout the three years of fighting, the United States remained the dominant voice at the UN and friction between the two blocs reached new heights. More specifically, in the early phases of the war India could do little to prevent Washington taking control of the military operation in Korea or stop UN forces crossing the thirty-eighth parallel. All the same, during the winter crisis of 1950–51 India had partial success uniting the Arab-Asian and Commonwealth members, forcing Washington to accept a series of cease-fire attempts, and delaying the adoption of the aggressor resolution. Furthermore, in the autumn of 1952, India, with firm support from its partners, took full advantage of the Truman administration's precarious position to produce a compromise solution to the long-running prisoners of war question. Although this triumph was not apparent until after Stalin's death when, at last, both sides seriously sought a cease-fire, the Indian resolution did eventually provide the means to bring about the Korean Armistice.

Finally, Nehru recognized both the successes and failures of India's role at the UN during the Korean War. These lessons had a direct impact on India's future foreign policy. Over the next decade Nehru was more determined than ever to try to mediate between the two superpowers, seeing the UN as a crucial forum for this purpose. But his views on how to achieve this objective altered significantly. In spite of certain successes during the Korean War, Nehru had become largely disappointed with his Commonwealth partners' willingness to only push Washington so far. Nehru, therefore, increasingly placed his allegiance squarely with the Third World, as was demonstrated by the instrumental role India played over the following decade in the emergence of the nonaligned movement, a group of developing states that were not aligned formally with or against either Cold War camp.

NOTES

Works frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations:

LAC	Libraries and Archives Canada
NAI MEA	National Archives of India Ministry of External Affairs
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
TNA: PRO	The National Archives of the United Kingdom: Public Records Office
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly Official Records
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USDS–FRUS	United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States

1. Shiv Dayal, *India's Role in the Korean Question*.
2. William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 51–52, 63–64, passim.
3. For good recent biographies on Nehru that mention India's role at the UN during the Korean War see, for instance, Judith Brown, *Nehru*, 127–28; Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life*, 256–68; B. R. Nanda, *Jawaharlal Nehru: Rebel and Statesman*, 197, 200, 224–25, 235, 245; G. Ramachandram, *Nehru and World Peace*, 1, 26–27, 56, 61–68, 80; Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru*, 1, 186, 200–204.
4. For more on Nehru's views of the Commonwealth and the UN see, for instance, Judith Brown, *Nehru*, 127–28, 184–85; Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life*, 178–79, 248–49, 251–58; Judith Brown, "Nehru," 201–2, 209–15; G. Ramachandram, *Nehru and World Peace*, 98–114; and Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence*, 2–5, 24–25, 28–29, 38, 50–51, 196.
5. United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (USDS–FRUS) Volume VII, 1950, Memorandum of Conversation (Charles Noyes), New York, June 25, 1950: 144–47.
6. United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Official Records, Fifth Year No. 15, 473rd Meeting, New York, June 25, 1950, 1–13.
7. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Memorandum of Conversation (Phillip Jessup), Washington, June 26, 1950: 178–83.
8. UNSC, Fifth Year No. 16, 474th Meeting, New York, June 27, 1950, 3–16.
9. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Telegram: Acheson–Henderson, Washington, June 27, 1950, 230–31.
10. The National Archives of the United Kingdom: Public Records Office (TNA: PRO). FO371/84041, Telegram: High Commission in India (Archibald Nye)–Commonwealth Relations Office (Patrick Gordon Walker), New Delhi, June 28, 1950.
11. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi, India, Papers of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1st Part), Subject File No. 59, Letter: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit–Jawaharlal Nehru, Washington, June 29, 1950.
12. National Archives of India Ministry of External Affairs (NAI MEA), China-Japan-Korea Branch, New Delhi, India, 67–CJK/50, Telegram: Secretary-General (Girja Bajpai)–Indian Permanent Representative to the UN (Benegal Rau), New Delhi, June 29, 1950.
13. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Telegram: US Permanent Representative to the UN (Warren Austin)–Acheson, New York, July 6, 1950, 321.

14. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Telegram: Henderson–Acheson, New Delhi, July 7, 1950, 324–25.
15. For more on the Indian peace feelers in early July 1950 see, for instance, Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 416–20; Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*, 22–23; and William Stueck, *The Korean War*, 51–54.
16. United Nations Data Statement (Truman), Washington, July 8, 1950, PSF: Korean War File, Truman Papers; Harry S. Truman Library.
17. NMML, Papers of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1st Part), Correspondence Letter: Nehru, Jawaharlal, Nehru–Pandit, New Delhi, July 8, 1950.
18. William Stueck, *The Korean War*, 72.
19. NMML, Papers of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1st Part), Correspondence Letter: Nehru, Jawaharlal, Nehru–Pandit, New Delhi, August 10, 1950.
20. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Telegram: Austin–Acheson, New York, August 9, 1950, 548–49.
21. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Telegram: Acheson–Austin, Washington, August 15, 1950, 585–86.
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28. Memorandum of Conversation (John Allison), New York, October 4, 1950, RG84/350/82/2/4, Box 45 Korea (September to December 1950), National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, College Park, MD.
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35. UNSC, Fifth Year No. 72, 530th Meeting, New York, November 30, 1950, 22–24.
36. UNGA, Fifth Session, Plenary 302nd Meeting, New York, November 3, 1950, 347.
37. TNA: PRO, FO371/84106, Telegram: Nye–Walker, New Delhi, December 5, 1950.
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42. Lester Pearson, *Mike: Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, 282.

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44. USDS–FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII, Telegram: Acheson–Austin, Washington, December 28, 1950, 1619–20.

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57. William Stueck, *The Korean War*, 152, 163–64.

58. William Stueck, *The Korean War*, 271.

59. For more on India’s bilateral attempts to find a solution to the prisoners of war question, see Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*, 132–33, 137–38; and William Stueck, *The Korean War*, 272, 278–80.

60. For accounts of the course of the Armistice talks during this period see, for instance, Wilfrid Bacchus, “The Relationship between Combat and Peace Negotiations,” 558–65; Sydney Bailey, *The Korean Armistice*, 70–126; Barton Bernstein, “The Struggle over the Korean Armistice,” 261–307; Rosemary Foot, “Negotiating with Friends and

Enemies,” 193–208; Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*, 42–107, 130–52; Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 15–51, 112–74, 263–82; C. Turner Joy, *Negotiating While Fighting*, 11–437; William Vatcher, *Panmunjom*, 20–177; and Charles Young, “POWs: The Hidden Reason for Forgetting Korea,” 317–32.

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69. UNGA, Seventh Session, First Committee 525th Meeting, New York, November 19, 1952, 111–15.

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71. USDS–FRUS, 1952–1954, Vol. XV, Telegram: Acheson–State Department, New York, November 19, 1952, 659–62.

72. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 705.

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82. William Stueck, *The Korean War*, 307–13, 326–27, 341; and William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 173–74.

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