

A Korean Conflict: The Tensions between Britain and America. By Ian McLaine.
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The modern American penchant for pulling Great Britain along in the wake or the main wave of foreign military interventions (see Iraq, Libya, Syria) has resulted in a reading public in the UK which is, for the most part, finely attuned to the moral modulations that follow from those actions. Witness now-departed Prime Minister David Cameron's testimony before the Defence Select Committee in autumn 2015, where the PM attempted with earnest futility to define the 'grey area' between terrorist leadership and innocent civilians when drone and air strikes were meant only to attack the former. Cameron might have easily outsourced responsibility for decision-making and civilian atrocities to the Americans, yet there he was, locked into the personal indignity and accountability of a parliamentary system which his US counterpart executive would never have to face. American presidents have left the work of explaining the new wars to generals in northern Virginia (or, better yet, on telescreen hook-ups to Virginia from their insulated desert bunkers), replete with an expanding and exculpatory lexicon of modern war-making. For these American generals and the President, there is very little impetus in hauling up the British involvement as salutary, or describing in a press conference how positive Anglo-American relations are impacting the battlespace tangibly.

To arrive, then, at a new historical treatment of Anglo-US relations focused around another deadly war with foggy parameters – Korea – is to probe at questions which surpass some of the standard bogeymen or foci of traditional historiography. After all, without access to enemy archives, how many revelations are really left to be discovered about General Douglas MacArthur stepping out of the chain of command, the approaching hammer blows of Chinese intervention, or the controversies over communist 'brainwashing' of US/UN prisoners of war? It is by delving into less certain terrain where more interesting research outcomes can be gained. Such terrain might include how unthinking partitions are harvested, questions of dissent and surveillance on the home front, of the stresses of fighting a war that seems most active in the psychological or propaganda front, all stemming from a morphing battle space inundated with a multitude of confusing allegiances, all under the shadow of possible and actual Russian interference.

Ian McLaine's new book is not that revisionist study, and it is hardly so explicitly presentist in its framing or its aims. Published posthumously, the book sets out traditional research methods, using primarily Foreign Office and ample documents from the UK National Archives at Kew Gardens, and Cabinet papers supplemented with memoirs and diplomatic correspondence (FRUS). Its protagonists are well known – Prime Minister Attlee, Foreign Secretary Bevin, and Secretary of State Acheson, surrounded by a host of minor part players who will spark interest among specialists in British foreign policy in the Cold War. These men – Sir William Strang, Sir Oliver Franks, Sir Alvary Gascoigne, Kenneth Younger, and so forth – have a main function in this book, which seems to be to torchlight the way for the big diplomats and statesmen. Many of the points made are not new in the least. McLaine points out that US-UK tensions over British recognition of the PRC was an irritant in the relationship, that Indian attempts to mediate in Korea came to naught, that the Chinese intervention in the conflict was poorly anticipated by both the American and British military, intelligence agencies, and political leaders, and that the UK played a restraining role with respect to US atomic deployment in the war theatre.

The book is entirely decoupled from the existing scholarship on the Korean War, and so its discussion of the domestic context in Korea is minimal, quite unlike recent Korean War books by Allan R. Millett, Bruce Cumings, and Kim Dong-choon. However, the author's archival grabs allow him some perspective via Alec Adams, the British Charge d'Affaires on the ground whose reports give more granular detail about Seoul after its recovery from the initial North Korean invasion following Inchon. The author's use of Weekly Summaries of the Research Department as well as Cabinet Papers are all overlaid by a careful reading of the British press which is impressive. There is a valuable section on the role that Hong Kong played in British strategic thinking and strength in the Far East. The individuals brought forward here, including Malcom MacDonald, the Secretary for Southeast Asia, give a new perspective on the Cold War – one being pushed forward at the moment by scholars like Alexander Shaw with a great deal more theorization or wide-angle context.

Probably most interesting is chapter 4, 'A war by any other name', a small gem of a chapter which delves into questions of the legality of the war in British government eyes, and with how to handle British dissenters. The former question leans on a paper circulated by the British Attorney-General in September 1950 which said that 'international law does not recognise a kind of twilight condition in which collective enforcement action is taken under the aegis of the United Nations' (p. 150). With respect to treason, the author writes up the well-known cases of Alan Winnington and Monica Felton, both of whom travelled within North Korea as guests of the DPRK during the conflict and who published harsh critiques of US/UN war conduct. But McLaine also delves into dissent expressed by established ex-Foreign Office figures like Sir John Pratt, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1951, who believed that the South Korean leader Syngman Rhee had ignited the war on the peninsula in collusion with the United States. Pratt laid out these views in an extensive speaking schedule across the United Kingdom, a 1951 pamphlet entitled 'Korea: The Lie that Led to War' and in an unpublished letter to the *Daily Telegraph*.

It is unfortunate that Pratt's letter cannot be easily located by readers of McLaine's book, nor indeed, can most of the sources cited. At the top of the single page of references provided, the editors of the volume explain, 'In the time between his death and the publication of this monograph, Dr. Ian McLaine's footnotes cardfile was lost.' Apparently the cost of hiring young researchers to reverse-engineer Dr McLaine's work was prohibitive, for this volume is un-footnoted and much of the material quoted at length is of unclear vintage. Apart from this somewhat flabbergasting flaw, the lack of reference whatever to the secondary literature means – with all due respect to the late author – that the book occasionally takes on the hue of a paper of a very bright undergraduate student who has had a wonderful time in the archive without having spent more than a couple of days reading previous analysis of what in many cases are the same documents. Nevertheless, in spite of its various flaws, McLaine's book highlights a number of areas and fascinating personalities which are ripe for more research, and will be of great interests to students of British diplomatic history, the UK in the Cold War, and Anglo-American relations at times of international conflict.

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