IS KOREA WORTH A WAR?

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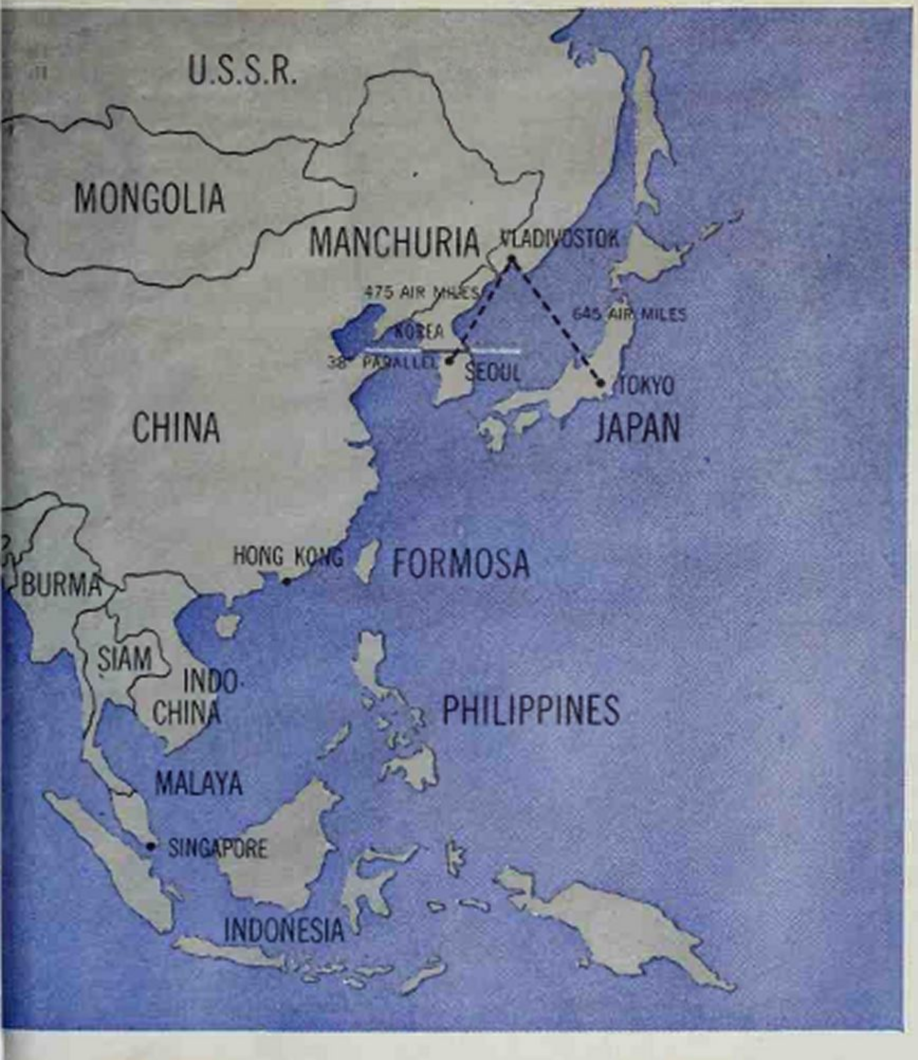
(ERE is, of course, no single British attitude
› China—any more than there is a single
rican attitude. Every separate shade of opin-
hat can be heard in the United States—from
: who think that Chiang is perfect to those
think that Mao can do no wrong—can be
l in Britain too. What seems from the out-
to be "the British attitude" is an amalgam
e same elements as "the American attitude."
the proportions in which they are mixed
ifferent. And if the proportions are different,
very largely because of the different impact
story and geography.
' the two, geography is the more important.
Far East is a very long way from London.
t is more, it is not an area that has ever been regarded by the British people, or their government, as one of vital interest to them. There is, of course, a large British stake in the Far East. In their great age of expansion in the 19th Century, the British penetrated the Far East as they did every other area of the globe save only the Russian heartland. They left their mark—in the shape of their great trading companies, their banks, their settlements. Britain fought a war with China more than 100 years ago, and made an alliance with Japan nearly 50 years ago.

But the Far East always came far down on the list of British interests. British capital, British power, British commerce, British cultural and missionary effort always went to India, to Australasia, to America (North and South), to Africa, even to the Middle East, more readily and in greater proportionate volume than to China.

When, after World War I, it began to be apparent that Britain was over-extended, that the enormous, widespread network of British influence and interests could not be sustained with the diminished power that Britain could exert in a more difficult world, it was in the Far East that the retreat began. Concessions and settlements were given up in the face of rising Chinese nationalism. There was no declared policy of quitting, and every effort of diplomacy would still be made to hold what had been acquired. But from the time when the concession in Hankow was surrendered in the middle twenties, it was clear that the Far East was one part of the globe where Britain regarded its liabilities as limited.

This peaceful retreat was the easier because in the Far East, unlike other parts of the world, the British expansionists of the 19th Century had not found it necessary, in order to protect their trade, to annex territory to the British Crown, and paint them red on the map. It is very much easier to surrender a settlement or a concession where the mystique of sovereignty is not involved and where there is no flag to be hauled down. How true this is can be seen from the one exception, Hong Kong.



Mixed Feelings

There are mixed feelings in Britain about Hong Kong. On the one hand, the realists are inclined to see it as a source of danger to Britain in the Far East. It is a pawn, far out from the centers of British power, exposed in a position where Britain by itself can hardly hope to put up a defense against determined and powerful attack. And yet by its existence it creates a commitment. It is a hostage, through which Britain can at any time be threatened or blackmailed by whichever power controls the mainland of South China or the South China Sea.

But if any realist were tempted to draw from the logic of his realism the proposal that Hong Kong be handed back to China, he would come up against the other side f the medal—the very great and real British pride in the achievement of Hong Kong. Handed back? Back to whom? When Hong Kong was ceded to Britain in 1840, it was a barren island. The great city, the teeming seaport, the thriving banks and markets, the industries, the social services, the great population—all of these are exclusively and entirely the fruits of British rule.

To talk of handing "back" is to talk nonsense. It would be as sensible to talk of handing back San Francisco to the Mexicans. It is true that the soil of Hong Kong was once Chinese, and that the cession was not entirely voluntary. But the chain of events by which Hong Kong became British was at least as creditable as the circumstances in which the Canal Zone became American. There will be a willingness in Britain to hand Hong Kong "back" to China about as soon as there is a readiness in the United States to hand

continued on next page

Any U.S. action enlarging the Korea

the Panama Canal, with all its installations, "back" to Colombia.

Meanwhile Hong Kong remains a dangerous hostage, and is one of the two reasons why Britain, which would like to forget about the Far East, can never quite do so. (Malaya, with its large Chinese population, and its Peking-inspired Chinese Communist bandits, is the other.) If it were not for these two hostages—one right in the Chinese arena, the other on the edge of it—the British would be heartily glad to let the Americans do all the worrying about the Far East, and derive all the profit or power to be gained thereby.

No Positive Policy

As it is, though Britain can never quite disengage itself from the problem of China, it is equally incapable of having a positive policy about it. London tends to support Washington in the Far East—so long as Washington's policy does not endanger Hong Kong or Malaya or look like creating trouble for Britain elsewhere. In the disagreements that have come to the surface during the war in Korea, Americans seem to the British to overlook how loyally Britain has supported American policies in and towards China ever since Pearl Harbor. Those policies have often seemed to the British to be dubious—or even downright mistaken.

For example, there was never much British love for Chiang Kai-shek or much confidence in his methods or intentions. But there was British cooperation with the American policy of building him up and pouring weapons into his hands. The British never opposed—though they always disliked—the American desire that China should be one of the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations. Policy in Korea, and relations with Russia in the Far East, were left entirely in American hands.

But what about the British recognition of Mao Tse-tung's government as the rightful government of China? Is that not evidence of a British desire to play a different, and a subtly anti-American game in the Far East? Not at all. The recognition took place six months *before* the Communist attack on Korea, when it was still possible to believe that Mao, if wooed, would be a second Tito. The reason why the Foreign Office was in such a hurry to recognize Mao was because it believed that the State Department was about to do the same thing. I am not asserting that this was in fact the State Department's intention—it has since been denied. But I am quite sure, from conversations I had at the time, that the Foreign Office *thought* that American recognition was on the way. They were not being disloyal to American policy as they understood it. By hurrying on ahead, they were simply trying to reap such advantages (especially in Hong Kong and Malaya) as might be derived from seeming to be in the van. Actually, they landed in the cart.

In the event, there were no advantages, and the whole recognition policy has turned out to be utterly mistaken. But it was not at the time a conscious divergence from American wishes. Once the recognition was made, it has been maintained, partly out of sheer pig-headedness; partly out of a total unwillingness to go back to dealing with Chiang and partly from appreciation of the fact that, whether or not the West likes it, Mao is unquestionably the ruler of China.

Similarly, in the whole long, weary Korean story, British policy, as seen from London, has been to give loyal support to American policy, hanging back only when the makers of American policy seemed to be running unnecessary risks. I know from personal experience that this description of Britain's actions is apt to be met with scornful laughter by Americans. And yet I am sure it is true.

Not Interested

There are a number of things that Americans seem to forget rather too easily. The first is that Britain has never had the slightest interest in Korea—indeed, up to the very eve of the Communist attack, it was General MacArthur's policy to keep British representatives entirely out of Korea whenever he could. Certainly Britain had no hand in the curious reversals of policy that first occupied and then evacuated South Korea. There is still argument in America over whether Korea is rightly to be placed just within or just outside the American "defense perimeter." Nobody has ever suggested that there is a British defense perimeter within thousands of miles.

It would be difficult to find a spot on the surface of the globe in which Britain has less interest, past, present or future. That Britain has nevertheless been ready to support American action in Korea both by votes at the United Nations and by troops in the field is a tribute, partly to a sincere desire to make the United Nations work, but mainly to a passionate desire to make the alliance with America work. If the decision of June, 1950, had to be made over again, the British would make it the same way. But it should be remembered that, while the Americans are fighting in support of a principle and also in defense of a major strategic and political interest of their own, the British are fighting in support of a principle only.

Secondly, when it comes to comparing relative efforts, Americans tend to overlook what is happening in Malaya—and the French complain even more bitterly that they are given little credit for what they are doing in Indo-China. The British in Malaya and the French in Indo-China, equally with the Americans in Korea, are fighting Communists of Chinese nationality, who draw their inspiration and their weapons from Peking and Moscow. Korea, it is true, is a United Nations war—but only by the accident that the Russians were boycotting the UN when the fighting st and the Security Council was able to act. T British and the French, this is a formal distin but still not a real difference.

The reality is that all three Western na are fighting communism in the Far East, and burdens they are shouldering in doing so ar alongside their relative resources, the result i as unequal as it can be made to appear by lo at Korea alone. Indeed, there is no doubt th the three, the heaviest strain falls on the Fr whose contribution in Korea is the smallest.

Korean Sideshow

But the essential point to grasp in any parison of British and American attitudes t Far East is not the difference (if any) i efforts the two peoples are making, but the that to the British the Far East is a sideshow irritating to have to make *any* effort there, the real danger—as every Englishman feels i bones—is in Europe. Every nation, and man, is ready on occasion to make sacrifices principle in which it believes. But how readier it would be if there were some self-int to be served along with the principle. Nor Singapore, the only remaining British inter Hong Kong; north of Hong Kong there is not

This explains why the British desire is a to limit and reduce the war in Korea, and General MacArthur used to send shivers dow British spine whenever he spoke. It would b ing too far to say that the British would r the war were lost in Korea than extended t mainland of China. But they would certain rather that if were deadlocked than extende

There are several reasons why the thoug a deadlock is less distasteful in London th is in Washington. Perhaps the simplest is British pride is less involved than Ameri

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var will strain alliances with the West

all, the direction of the war has not been
itish hands. Secondly, the British people—
d, all the West European peoples—do not
in terms of *defeating* communism, in the
way that Americans do. The Europeans
been living with the Soviet government for
ars. They want to set limits to its expansion;
would be overjoyed to see it disappear;
they are profoundly unwilling to pay the
of another war, or even to run any sig-
nt risk of another war, to get rid of it.
tainment" exactly expresses the limit of
hope and desire. It is all that they think is
ble without war, and they are always nerv-
when Americans talk as if containment were
nough. (What soured Europe on Eisenhower
e presidential campaign was his flirting with
Foster Dulles's ideas of "liberation.")

Grab Frustrated

anslated into Korean terms, this means that
British (and even more the other Europeans)
ire no more than that the Communists' in-
d grab should be frustrated. And that was
as soon as General Ridgway had fought his
back to the 38th Parallel. Nor are the Brit-
ery worried by the prospect of an unsettled
nd an undemarcated border. That, in fact,
st what they have always been used to.
e may not in fact be much resemblance be-
n the British watch on the North-West fron-
of India, which lasted for the best part of a
ry, and the American watch on the 38th
llel. But to the British the similarity is great.
e final, and most important, reason for al-
saying No to any proposal of active meas-
to bring the Korean war to a head, is the
sion of men and material from Europe that
d be involved. Americans may perhaps have
tten General Vandenberg's testimony during
the MacArthur hearings, to the general effect that an all-out offensive against China would denude the NATO army in Europe of its air cover. But to the British and the other West Europeans, that seemed to be confirmation of their worst fears about the MacArthur policy.

Sympathy the Difference

This article is about the British attitude, not the American. I am deliberately stating one side of the case—the one that is heard less frequently in America. But that does not mean that nobody in England sees why Americans feel as they do. On the contrary, it is noticeable that whenever Mr. Churchill has any statement to make on the subject, he always counsels his countrymen to remember the sacrifices that America has made in Korea and the natural impatience that Americans have to bring the whole wretched business to an end.

But it is also noticeable that this access of tact and sympathy is the only difference between Mr. Churchill's views on the Far East and Mr. Attlee's. The Conservative government is no less anxious than the Socialists to limit the commitment and to avoid a showdown. Mr. Churchill and his professional advisers have screwed up their courage to the point of recognizing that, in certain circumstances, it might be necessary to carry the war into China. But with all their hearts they hope that these circumstances will not arise.

If there is a new, deliberate and massive offensive by the Chinese against the Americans, or if Mao (as was rumored a few months ago) were to declare war on the United States, and particularly if he were to attack anywhere outside Korea—if, in short, it is the Chinese who take the initiative in extending the war, then the British will back the Americans in whatever they do (though the British troops in Korea will probably have to be withdrawn to defend Hong Kong).

But if it is the Americans who take the initiative in carrying the war across the Yalu, I would not like to predict what will happen, save that the alliance of the United States with the other free nations of the world will come under very heavy strain indeed. It is worth remembering that, whenever their opinions have been indicated, the other nations participating in the war in Korea—including quite specifically Canada—have taken a "British" rather than an "American" view.

Lack of Logic

If you complain that this attitude of being willing to fight the Chinese on the existing fronts (which are of their choosing), but not elsewhere, is illogical, I think most British observers would agree. But they might retort by pointing out a lack of logic and consistency on the American side too. Everybody knows that Russians, as well as Chinese, are fighting in Korea. But I have yet to hear any serious American proposal that the Russian base at Vladivostok be bombed by the U.S. Air Force.

Yet the logical reason for doing so is exactly the same as the logical reason for bombing the Chinese bases in Manchuria. Why follow logic in the Chinese case but not in the Russian? Obviously because to drop bombs on Russia would be to start World War III, and to do so at the wrong place and the wrong time. Clearly, then, discretion and a world-wide view of strategy must put curbs on plain logic and human impatience. When analyzed down to their roots, the only real difference between the American and the British attitudes to China lies in the precise point at which they apply discretion.