

Making of the 'Korean Question': A Reassessment of India's Position at the United Nations

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This paper argues that India's seemingly demonstrated 'great power capabilities,' categorized here as 'deviant state behavior,' in fact led to a number of 'binding constraints' impacting its ability to positively influence the settlement of the 'Korean Question' at the United Nations. Theoretically, India's approach to pursuing great power status was justified by the 'dependency' paradigm based on its premise of North-South cleavages, which effectively countered the dominant account produced by 'structural realism' and its concept of East-West bipolarity. By following Nehru's 'hybrid idealism,' India was able to upgrade its stature as a leader of the 'Third World' with great power prestige. However, without possessing commensurable economic means, India created a stark foreign policy mismatch that compelled it to take a number of policy U-turns, like accepting UNTCOK's botched-up zonal election bid, opposing UN forces crossing the 38th parallel and involving itself with the repatriation of POWs.

Keywords: Great Powers, Bipolarity, United Nations, India, Korea

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I . Introduction

An aggressive articulation of national interests by powerful countries in the international system has given birth to a number of distortions often impacting the legitimate dreams and aspirations of weaker countries.¹ One such distortion sucked a peninsular nation Korea into a bitter political contest among the victorious powers in World War II. This interest contestation among major powers was further aggravated by an ensuing ideological rivalry between capitalism and communism which prompted a serious re-thinking about the unconditional support given to the cause of liberation, separation and autonomy of colonial possessions belonging to the defeated powers.

In the backdrop of this volatile international context, an ordinary matter related to Korean independence became a point of distrust and confusion among major powers. The unnecessary inclusion of the phrase 'due course' in the Cairo Conference (1943) further evolved into a complicated idea of 'trusteeship' at the Moscow Conference held in December 1945.² Unfortunately, when most of the other colonies were able to gain full independence, the Korean Peninsula was singled out as one of the prime suspects infected with communist ideology. In a quick succession of events, a sovereign country was reduced merely to a question to be resolved by international bodies such as the United Nations.

Facing an existential crisis, Korea looked towards prominent countries having an independent opinion in the international system to find a way out of the deteriorating situation. A sub-continent size country, India, recently awoken from its long slumber of colonial subjugation, emerged in the international scene as a new voice for marginalized nations. India supported

1 Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1981); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

2 It was believed that Korea was not ready for self-government, thus the victorious powers of WWII proposed that the country should be placed under temporary international trusteeship in which the US, Great Britain, Soviet Russia and China would participate.

the 'Third World' project through articulating an alternative perspective in the international system.³ Not only Korea but entire Afro-Asia looked up to India with genuine confidence and hope. Having deep-seated historical, cultural and emotional ties with India, the Korean Peninsula, during its turbulent post-independent phase, naturally expected support from a country that was at the forefront of a long anti-colonial movement.

India and Korea not only belonged to the Asian identity framework but also shared close historical ties. Both countries were deeply connected by a popular myth suggesting that an Indian princess from Ayodhya married a Korean king from the Gaya Dynasty.⁴ Giving a further fillip to this mythical association, the spread of Mahayana Buddhism from India to Korea nurtured a cultural oneness that still reverberates in India's imagination of Korea. Similarly for Korea, India has been considered as the holy land of Buddha with unique spiritual value.

This historical affinity further expanded by the shared colonial struggle that made Korean people maintain a keen interest in the ebb and flow of India's epic struggle for freedom, especially after the historic March First Movement (1919). The enormous significance of Gandhi's concept of *Swadeshi* (goods made in one's own country) was not only well understood but also provided an inspiration to launch a similar movement in Korea. The *Chajakhoe*, set up in December 1922, and *MulsanChangyohoe*, in February 1923, propagated Gandhi's ideology of *Swadeshi* in Korea.

During the anti-colonial struggle, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in a letter to his daughter on December 30, 1932: "The suppression of the Koreans by the Japanese is a very sad and dark chapter in history."⁵

3 The idea of the 'Third World' project flows from the 'dependency theory' that claims North-South cleavages as the main cause of underdevelopment in the global south and refutes artificially imposed East-West bipolarity.

4 According to a legend depicted in a Korean history book 'Samguk Yusa', an Indian princess from Ayodhya married Korea's Gaya king, Kim Suro.

5 Sonia Gandhi, *Two Alone, Two Together: Letters between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru 1922-1964* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005).

Similarly, the Indian National Congress, in one of its resolutions in August 1942, condemned Japanese militarism-colonialism and demanded that none of the colonies of Japan should be placed under any other colonial power. In the post-independent phase, India showed continued engagement in the changing peninsular situation.

Many believe that India followed a well-thought, principled policy towards the Korean question in the UN debates. Nonetheless, a few gray areas have emerged requiring research-based clarifications.⁶ India particularly needs to explain lingering doubts among the people of Korea as to why New Delhi could not stand up in the United Nations to safeguard the unity of their nation by failing to firmly oppose UNTCOK's bid to hold election only in the southern zone. More specifically, Chairman of UNTCOK, an Indian diplomat named K.P.S. Menon, made a U-turn that raised eyebrows on India's approach to the Korean Question. Ultimately, zonal elections conducted under Menon's Chairmanship became the precursor to a brutal and painful division of a homogenous country.

Ideas and arguments in this paper are organized in the following manner. Section 2 discusses how complex geopolitical maneuvering by great powers dragged the simple question of Korean independence to the UN General Assembly. Section 3 provides a critique to the theoretical justification based on structural realist accounts promoting the artificial idea of East-West rivalry that sucked the Korean Peninsula into its fold. Based on the dependency paradigm and its hypothesis of South-South cooperation, India's promotion of 'Third world' identity focused on non-alignment, offering a way out from the superpower constructed bipolar reality. Section 4 explains how India articulated a different understanding of world politics by constructing a distinct 'Third World' identity based on South-South solidarity, however, without commensurate economic means, India's attempts to reshape the international system dominated by the great powers could not produce tangible results. Instead, scholars placed these actions in the 'deviant state behavior' category. Section 5 confirms that India's 'deviant' foreign policy behavior led to a number of crucial policy U-turns

6 Ross N. Berkes et. al., *The Diplomacy of India: Indian Foreign Policy in the United Nations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958).

concerning the settlement of the Korean Question in the UN, particularly its role in the UNTCOK. Section 6 concludes how the 'United Korea' policy that India articulated in the UN falls flat in the face of an intense great power rivalry.

II. Great Power Politics and the Making of the 'Korean Question'

The euphoria of peace and freedom generated by the conclusion of WWII evaporated with the unfolding great power rivalry. Neo-colonial powers demonstrated firm resolve to play a key role in the shaping of newly independent countries. Intense political bickering on matters of national independence was particularly aimed at colonies belonging to defeated powers. At this point, the issue of Korean independence quickly became the focal point between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.

Korea becoming a pawn in the great power contest was not new. Early on, Korea was shown its place in the international system. There was no Korean participation in the Moscow Conference or in any previous discussion by allies about Korea. The high handedness of great power politics contributed to ensuring that Korean representatives did not become party to any discussion on the future of their country. Apparently ignored during the Moscow Conference, Korean nationalists resisting Japanese colonialism were able to form 'People's Committees' all over the peninsula. The Soviet occupation government, which controlled territory North of the 38th parallel fully incorporated these 'People's Committees' in the structures of governance, but the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) helped to suppress these committees in the areas South of the 38th parallel.⁷ This development brought sharp ideological conflict to the Korean doorstep. In a major anti-communist sweep, Korea's first unified government – People's Republic of Korea (PRK) – was forcefully dismembered.⁸

7 Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (Volume II) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

8 On September 12, 1945, CPKI (Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence) activists established the People's Republic of Korea, but USAMGIK refused to recognize it and outlawed it on December 12, 1945.

On July 19, 1947, Yo Un-hyung, head of the PRK, was assassinated in Seoul.⁹

Under the shadow of an ensuing great power ideological rivalry, agreements made during the Moscow Conference could not stand the test of the unfolding ground reality. By the summer of 1947, a bilateral joint commission agreed upon at Moscow was making no substantial progress towards the formation of a provisional government in Korea. In the meantime, peninsular politics was increasingly dominated by the rising popularity of the left-leaning 'People's Committees.' In the face of Korea's decisive tilt towards communism, the US State Department decided to drag the issue of Korean independence to the UN General Assembly. In any case, by 1947, the US State Department planning included involving the UN in elections to establish a separate provisional government in its zone.¹⁰ The active involvement of the UN in deciding the future course of Korea happened despite agreement among the major powers that any question arising due to the peace treaties concluded at the end of WWII should not be placed before the UN.

Acting in haste to contain the spread of communist ideology, the US dragged the issue of Korean independence to the UN General Assembly. The US genuinely feared that taking the Korean issue to the UN Security Council could face a Soviet veto. Sensing the implicit 'containment of communism' behind the US strategy, the USSR voiced its concern and challenged the US move by citing the relevant clauses in the Moscow Agreement. As per the provisions of the Moscow Agreement, the USSR stressed that the Korean Question was a product of WWII and thus it should be appropriately addressed only by the parties involved in the Moscow Agreement (1945). The Soviet Union contested the US proposal at the Joint-Commission as well at the UN General Assembly.

While ignoring Soviet efforts, the US suggested that by the beginning of 1948, both sides should move their troops out of the peninsula to facilitate the establishment of a national government.¹¹ A survey conducted at that

9 A 19-year-old man named Han Chigeun, a recent refugee from North Korea and an active member of a nationalist right-wing group, assassinated Yo Un-hyung. For details, see Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea* (London: Routledge, 2002).

10 Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 65-66.

time reveals that 57 percent of Koreans living in the US zone supported the Soviet proposal.¹² Showing great disregard for Korea's popular public opinion, which was increasingly coming under the grip of left-leaning ideologies, the US decided to involve the UN before giving any thought to removing its troops from the peninsula.

Despite serious objections raised by the Soviet Union, the UN General Assembly went ahead to place the issue of Korean independence on its agenda. The USSR though rejected the legitimacy of the General Assembly debating the Korean Question, but at the same time, submitted its proposals for consideration by the Assembly. The USSR was very vocal in defending the right to self-determination by the Korean people and demanded the participation of Korea in the UN debates related to their national independence. The US however played subtle politics and proposed amendments to the USSR's proposal requiring Korean participation. Instead of agreeing to Korean participation, the US proposed a commission sent to Korea. The USSR supported the idea of sending such a commission but insisted that such action must be decided only by the Security Council. Based on the USSR draft recognizing the "rightful claims of the people of Korea to independence," the UN General Assembly passed a resolution.¹³

With the General Assembly resolution passed, the entire focus now shifted to the US amendment requiring the establishment of UNTCOK (United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea).¹⁴ The USSR rejected the legitimacy of the process involving the formation of UNTCOK and clarified its intention not to cooperate with it. Many other countries also expressed initial reservations to the idea of UNTCOK. Ukraine outright rejected the establishment of UNTCOK.

11 Leon Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Unification of Korea: The Politics of Field Operations, 1947-1950* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 17.

12 Soon Sung Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 174.

13 "General Assembly Resolution 112 (II)," New York, November 14, 1947, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/2/ares2.htm>.

14 In order to facilitate the participation of representatives of the Korean people, the UNTCOK was assigned duty to travel, observe and hold consultations throughout Korea.

Canada initially showed reluctance to accept UNTCOK but eventually sent a participant. Here, the US used its influence to persuade countries to accept the UNTCOK.

Finally, the US proposal prevailed. The UN General Assembly sent the UNTCOK to Korea with the mandate to facilitate the attainment of national independence and to streamline the withdrawal of occupying forces. Under the leadership of Victor Hugo, a formal official of the Chinese nationalist government having close ties with the right-wing elements in Korea, a secretariat of UNTCOK was organized. From the very beginning, the UNTCOK had two key obstacles; 1) USSR rejection of the legitimacy of UNTCOK and thus limiting its observers only to the US zone; and 2) Socioeconomic turmoil restricting the UNTCOK not to consult with many left-leaning parties and individuals. In fact, the US already outlawed the Korean Communist Party in May 1946.

Facing numerous bottlenecks, the UNTCOK concluded that it was unable to observe a national election in the entire peninsula and reported back the same to the Interim Committee of the General Assembly. The US was able to manage the deadlock faced by UNTOCK due to its alleviated moral authority which it earned by firmly opposing colonialism, Nazism and fascism, and its world-wide support for democracy. Negotiating from a very high moral ground, the US government was able to mold international opinion in favor of the so-called 'free world' and against communist ideology. The USSR strongly objected to attempts aimed at diminishing the UN Security Council's primacy and characterized the US move as "an illegal commission seeking instructions from an illegal committee."¹⁵

Not only the USSR but a number of other countries, particularly India, Canada and Australia opposed the direction that the US wanted to follow. The US decision to go with a zonal election was considered as the first stage in the formation of a separate South Korea.¹⁶ Zonal elections were seen as the division of the peninsula.¹⁷ It is intriguing why the US military government

15 Soon Sung Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 174.

16 Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Unification of Korea*, 74-75.

in the southern part of Korea showed such a hurry even before the UNTCOK held a formal meeting, announcing that there would be an election on May 9, 1948. Moreover, commissioners' opinion over this announcement was divided; particularly the Canadian commissioner believed that if holding elections only in the southern zone contributes nothing to the unity of the Korean nation, then the Commission has no right to participate in such an election process. Indian and Australian commissioners too supported observations made by the Canadian commissioner. Taking a step further, the Indian commissioner stressed that conducting elections only in the US zone was not legally sound.

In order to defuse growing international dissatisfaction, the US suggested that the Interim Committee had made a political decision, not a legal one. Despite grave doubts, the Indian Commissioner was under instructions from his government to proceed with supporting the idea of election. It's not yet clear under what pressure the Indian government acceded to the zonal elections. Here, Nehru's 'hybrid idealism,'¹⁸ which often tied his hands and led him to accept what the great powers dictated, was in display. Turning a blind eye, the French commissioner also took the same position. It is obvious that India failed to firmly oppose the election process which was limited to the US zone itself. More so, Indian diplomat, KPS Menon, accepted the proposal to chair the election process exclusively in the Southern zone, raising certain questions that could be detrimental to the credibility of the country's foreign policy establishment.

Having total control over the entire election process, the US military government appointed a majority of members from Syngman Rhee's group and its conservative affiliate, the Korean Democratic Party (KDP) in the National Election Commission. Facing strong public resistance, it was difficult for the UNTCOK to function smoothly. According to Jay Hauben, the UNTCOK was able to make short inspection visits merely to 2 percent of the polling places.¹⁹

17 Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950*, 174.

18 Nehruvian idealism, which oscillated between and among nationalism, socialism and realism, has been categorized by the author as 'hybrid idealism.'

19 Jay Hauben, "Is the UN Role in Korea 1945-1953 the Model Being Repeated

Korean officials and the US military personnel were always accompanying and guiding commissioners whenever they needed to make visits outside Seoul. The signs of highhandedness exercised by the US and right-wing groups connected to Syngman Rhee were visible in run-up to elections: "A survey conducted in Seoul found that almost 80 percent of eligible voters had registered to vote but many indicated they had been forced to register or not receive an election stamp on their ration card or by other threats."²⁰ Most of the Korean politicians and their political parties in the southern zone communicated to the visiting commissioners that they were opposed to elections.

Sensing the adverse impact of elections happening only in one part of Korea, widespread strikes, demonstrations and protests erupted. This open public outrage was brutally suppressed by using formal police and constabulary as well as informal right-wing youth groups. According to Gordenker's 'Field Observations,' in the ten days before the election, 323 persons, including 32 Korean policemen, were killed in riots and raids.²¹ Bruce Cumings wrote that "on the island of Jeju 50 miles southwest of the Korean Peninsula, there was an open rebellion in opposition to rightwing terrorism and to the election which would create a separate South Korea. ...Over the next year, between 30,000 and 80,000 Jeju people were killed during the suppression of the rebellion."²²

After expressing its support for the election only in the American zone, the UNTCOK ignored any attempt by Korean political groups to form a national government. A high-profile North-South political conference did take place in Pyongyang in late-April 1948, but till this time the UNTCOK already moved ahead with its plans to conduct elections in the US zone.²³ Anticipating

Today?" (presentation, Political Science and International Relations Academic Community Conference, Beijing, July 14-15, 2012).

20 Hauben, *Is the UN Role in Korea 1945-1953 the Model Being Repeated Today?*, 6.

21 Gordenker, *Field Observations*, 106. See also, Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (Volume II) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 72-78.

22 Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York, Modern Library Press, 2010), 124-125.

disturbances, military authorities quickly organized a right-wing youth group under the banner of "Community Protective Corps." This group helped military authorities in supervising the election held on May 10, 1948. In the midst of continuing anti-election and anti-opposition violence and a boycott call given by many center and left parties, an election was conducted in Korea.

The US military government data reveals that almost 7,500,000 Koreans voted out of a population of over 20 million, a little more than one third.²⁴ Ignoring charges against control of the election process by the US military government and the right-wing party, the UNTCOK sent its report to the General Assembly: "The result of the ballot was a valid expression of the free will of the electorate of those parts of Korea which were accessible to the Commission and in which the inhabitants constituted approximately two-thirds of the people of all Korea."²⁵ The UNTCOK took more than a month after the election to write its report. The US government and the UN both brushed aside the extremely limited and compromised role of the UNTCOK in the election process and documented the election as "sanctioned" or "supervised" by the United Nations.

While the General Assembly debated the "Korean Question" in December 1948, the Soviet Union and its allies argued tirelessly for an invitation to the DPRK to participate in the debate. The Soviet side was vehemently against accepting UNTCOK's endorsement of the May 10th 1948 election. The Soviet Union cited UNTCOK's interim reports documenting a number of obstacles to a 'fair' election. Under US influence, the majority rejected these arguments and documentation provided by USSR. As a result, on 12, December 1948, the UN General Assembly Resolution 195 (III) was passed stating: "...that there has been established a lawful government (the Government of the Republic

23 Lester B. Pearson, *Memoirs* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1973), 320, as quoted in John Price, "The 'Cat's Paw': Canada and the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea," *The Canadian History Review*, vol. 85, no. 2 (June, 2004): 308, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/169031/pdf>.

24 Hauben, *Is the UN Role in Korea 1945-1953 the Model Being Repeated Today?*, 6.

25 As quoted in Frank Baldwin (ed.), *Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relationship since 1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), 12.

of Korea) ...over the part of Korea where the Temporary Commission was able to observe ...based on elections which were the valid expression of the free will of the electorate ...and that this is the only such Government of Korea."²⁶ The December 12, 1948 resolution also created a United Nations Commission on Korea (UNCOK) to replace the temporary UNTCOK. The resolution though did not call the ROK a national government nor recommend its recognition by UN member states, but by using subtle diplomatic maneuvering, the US supported ROK's entitlement to UN membership representing the entire peninsula.

The above developments confirm the deepening crisis of world politics which represent a monumental failure of what appeared to be the original General Assembly intent – end of the zonal occupation, no to the division of the Korean Peninsula and facilitation of a national Korean state. The tenor and tone of the increasingly fragmented world polity more or less set the things in the peninsula – the creation of ROK (Republic of Korea) in the US zone was followed by the creation of DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) in the Soviet zone. The foreign policy establishment in the US carefully shifted the entire blame of dividing a nation on to the UNTCOK, which in turn was created by it. India's role in the UN-mandated election process forms the very basis on which the division of Korea was premised. This raises certain questions related to the Indian state's 'deviant' foreign policy behavior, particularly the issue of acceptance by its diplomat KPS Menon to chair the election process only in the southern zone.

²⁶ "General Assembly Resolution 195 (III)," New York, 1948, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/3/ares3.htm>.

III. Theoretical Perspectives on the 'Korean Question'

The factors responsible for India's stated position and associated policy U-turns on the question of the Korean peninsula at the UN have origins in the sharply differing theoretical understanding of world politics. During that time, twin paradigms explaining unfolding realities of world politics came into prominence; one, structural realism that saw the world divided into rival East-West camps dominated by superpowers which sucked the Korean Peninsula into its fold, and the other, based on the dependency paradigm and its hypothesis of South-South cooperation that envisioned a non-aligned constituency led by the 'Third World' as a way out from superpower constructed bipolarity.

India's search for securing a wider space for itself and other underdeveloped countries resulted in the active promotion of solidarity among the newly decolonized countries. By promoting ideals like Afro-Asian unity, Asian solidarity and non-alignment, Indian leadership in the post-independent phase mounted a vigorous contest to ideas supporting superpower-imposed East-West bipolarity. In doing so, India started to move beyond the set limits of its under-developed economy, which was riddled with chronic poverty and thus tied to middle power status.²⁷ Seeing a discrepancy between India's capabilities and its foreign policy behavior, some even concluded that the country was swayed by 1930s European-style idealism as it largely turned its back on strategic thinking.²⁸

The two prominent instances supporting claims regarding India's attempted great power behavior have been identified. One, India's domination of the foreign and security policies of its Himalayan neighbors based on unequal treaties with Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim; and two, India's 'big brother' role

27 J.D. Sethi, "India as Middle Power," *India Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April-June 1969): 107-121.

28 For Nehru's idealist foreign policy account, see Jyotindra Nath Dixit, *Across borders: fifty years of India's foreign policy* (New Delhi: Picus Books, 1998); Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (New York: Macmillan, 1999); Bimal Prasad, *The Origins of India's Foreign Policy: The Indian National Congress and World Affairs, 1885-1947*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Bookland, 1962).

in guaranteeing security to Burma and Laos. More so, India's policies led Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to fear its absorption into India, thereby compelling the nation to enter into a defense agreement with the United Kingdom in 1951.²⁹ Based on these claims, the US State Department concluded in the 1950s that India could become Japan's successor in Asiatic imperialism.³⁰ The New York Times in 1953 made the observation that Nehru wanted Indian dominance in Asia, the Near East, and Africa as well.³¹ Not only did the West view India's action with suspicion, but the Chinese also believed Nehru's core ambition was to establish a 'Greater Indian Empire' within the realm of the old British Empire.³² Once in a while, Nehru himself wondered whether India was living in an artificial atmosphere of its own making.

Indeed, during 1947-1962, India clearly demonstrated a glaring mismatch between its capabilities and foreign policy conduct, thereby qualifying its behavior as being 'deviant.'³³ While possessing middle power capabilities, India behaved like a great power or actually sought a great power status.³⁴ The dominant narrative in the scholarship focused on the study of Indian foreign policy concludes that India was a middle power under Nehru, but the country was unusually committed to international causes. "Indian foreign policy has suffered heavily from an inordinate time lag in her adjustment

29 Shelton U. Kodikara, *Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka: A Third World Perspective* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1982), 84-85.

30 Baldev Raj Nayar and T.V. Paul, *India in the World Order: Searching for Major Power Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 119.

31 The New York Times, December 8-9, 1953 made this observation, which was cited in Escott Reid, *Envoy to Nehru* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 103.

32 John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 19.

33 For India's foreign policy behavior, see Nabarun Roy, "A Study of State Deviant Behaviour: Indian Foreign Policy, 1947-62" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University, Canada, 2011); and J.D. Sethi, "India as Middle Power," *India Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April-June 1969): 107-121

34 Japan in the second-half of the 19th century was a classic example of a country convinced that it too deserved equal status with European powers. Similarly, after independence, in the period between 1947-1962, Indian foreign policy actions gave the impression that the country was actively pursuing a great power status.

to changing realities. She still clings to the concept of absolute security or superpower *détente*."³⁵

Fully consumed in harboring a great power self-image in tune with its post-colonial euphoria, India could not align itself with the dominant structural realist account based on the bipolarity between East & West. Rather, India's own experiences of humiliation under colonial subjugation deeply impacted its views regarding world politics. India's overt tilt towards the North-South dichotomy promoted by the dependency paradigm and the resultant idea of non-alignment with none of the great powers represents its own historical subjugation under centuries of colonial rule. Moving along with the 'Bandung spirit,' Nehru actively sought to break the status quo unduly favoring colonial-neocolonial interests. According to Odd Arne Westad: "In a historical sense – and especially as seen from South – the Cold War was a continuation of colonialism through slightly different means."³⁶

The Korean Peninsula, dominated by great power interest articulation, could not see the reality beyond structural realist accounts and was compelled to understand world politics only from the dominant bipolarity framework. Indeed, Korean leadership, particularly in the US zone, was propped-up by keeping hegemonic interests in mind, not to safeguard Korean national interests. A standard narrative of the Cold War based on 'structural realism' became an accepted norm in the peninsula. The 'Acheson line,' stretching from the Aleutian Islands to the Philippines in the Pacific to Japan and Okinawa in the North excluded Korea and Taiwan formed the US "defense perimeter," but Washington soon realized the peninsula's strategic value in the bipolar setting. Thus, in a self-correction mode, the United States quickly signed a mutual defense and aid treaty with Seoul on January 26, 1950.

35 J.D. Sethi, "India as Middle Power," *India Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April-June 1969): 120.

36 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126.

3.1 Bipolarity, Neutralism and the Great Power Politics

The bipolar account of structural realism functioned as a conservative force in world politics that carefully legitimized as well as reinforced the structures of the Cold War. It seems that structural realism has a normative commitment to Cold War politics and maintains that states would be better-off to work within the existing world order.³⁷ It is important to note that structural realism concentrates on the operation of interstate competition, but the theory is oblivious to the fact that the dominant states have a common interest in maintaining international structures that enable the exploitation of the weak. For instance, both the US and USSR had common interest not only in maintaining bipolarity but also in accomplishing equilibrium through a well-thought 'balance of power' hypothesis.³⁸ In fact, structural realism provided a framework to understand the Cold War, but at the same time, it reinforced the Cold War.

Structural realist accounts tend to frame the two superpowers almost as the victims of the Cold War. These accounts argue that superpowers were virtually forced into their hegemonic roles by structurally induced forces. However, in reality, as US Secretary of State Dean Acheson warned, "neutralism" was "a short-cut to suicide."³⁹ John Foster Dulles said neutralism was "immoral."⁴⁰ The oft repeated warnings against 'neutralism' reflect the imposition of the Cold War framework.

37 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1979).

38 Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, "Realism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, eds. John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90-106.

39 Quoted in Richard P. Dauer, *A North-South Mind in an East-West World: Chester Bowles and the Making of United States Cold War Foreign Policy, 1951-1969* (Westport, 2005), 35-36.

40 Quoted in Immanuel Wallerstein, "What Cold War in Asia? An Interpretative Essay," in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Mind*, eds. Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu and Michael Szonyi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 15-24.

3.2 Institutionalizing Bipolarity in the Korean Peninsula

The most important symbol of bipolarity emerged in the Korean Peninsula when both the South and the North were forced to take sides. According to Michael Yahuda, the inter-Korean War resulted in further institutionalizing the Cold War order on the peninsula as the US offered bilateral pacts with Japan, Korea, Philippines and Thailand.⁴¹ The 38th parallel, which was introduced only as an imaginary line, quickly became convenient to both super-powers and thus without any debate and discussion, this line became Korea's *fait accompli*. Not only the US, but the USSR surprisingly accepted the 38th parallel without any delay.

'Neutrality' became unacceptable to both super-powers as East-West bipolarity effectively legitimized the Cold War order on the Korean Peninsula. Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed out that the Cold War order was a hegemonic structure.⁴² The domination of structural realist accounts clouded Korea's chances of national unity. The ideological contest that the US-USSR played to promote their interests swiftly expanded its iron grip over the peninsula. Indian foreign policy based on the idealism of the anti-colonial movement failed to see the structural constraints imposed by Cold War-era bipolarity on a small country.

It is still intriguing to know how such ideological fault lines became acceptable to the Korean people. Answering this query takes us deeper into the country's pre-colonial history, which carefully protected the interests of an agrarian elite, known as *Yangban*. With the sudden end of Japanese colonialism, Korea's highly organized 'people's committees' vigorously sought the redistribution of land controlled by the *Yangban* class. A new bitter class contest was then played between the impoverished majority inspired by Communism and the elite *Yangban* minority increasingly aligned with right-wing activism in the capitalist framework. This bitter class divide and

41 Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific* (London: Routledge, 2011).

42 Immanuel Wallerstein, "What Cold War in Asia? An Interpretative Essay," in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Mind*, eds. Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu and Michael Szonyi (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

its struggles were used as an effective policy instrument by rival superpowers to fragment and polarize Korean society for their own benefits. Indeed, domestic ideological polarization on the peninsula made the superpowers' jobs much easier.

3.3 India and the Alternative Account of Bipolarity on the Korean Peninsula

India, seeking a wider and more respectful space for itself and the other newly decolonized countries, vigorously contested the imposition of bipolarity in world politics. By embracing the ideas from the dependency theory, the Indian foreign policy establishment put forward a brave face to replace bipolarity with non-alignment.⁴³ The stated position of India at the UN on the question of Korean independence has been a systematic articulation of its world view, which clearly negated the superpowers' unwritten consent to impose East-West bipolarity.

However, India's persistent underdevelopment robbed its capacity to deconstruct the great power hegemony operationalized through dominant knowledge systems and associated theoretical assertions. It has been argued that India's foreign policy articulation confirmed a 'deviant state behavior' as the country did demonstrate great power behavior in spite of possessing middle power capabilities.⁴⁴ India's infatuation with non-alignment has its own merit, but on the face of dominant structural realist accounts, the majority of newly decolonized countries increasingly started to move away from the narrative of non-alignment. Korea was no exception to this general trend towards aligning with one of the great powers. The structural realist account articulated by both super-powers as well as acknowledged by both North and South Korea contradicted India's search for a greater role in world politics.

43 India's credentials of non-alignment witnessed a significant change when it signed the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union in 1971.

44 Roy, *A Study of Deviant State Behavior*, 2011.

IV. India's Foreign Policy Behavior, United Nations and the Korean Peninsula

Indian leadership in the post-independent phase clearly articulated its idealist worldview. A victim of colonial exploitation, India boldly pleaded for continuous de-colonization of the world and worked tirelessly to establish a democratic and equitable world order. This was a tall order for a country that suffered under centuries of colonial as well as feudal exploitation. In a world rallying behind two rival superpower camps, India's principled policy of non-alignment was interpreted by the great powers as the creation of a third power bloc rivaling existing superpowers. However, in the absence of matching economic means, scholars have interpreted India's aspiration to lead the 'Third World' as a 'deviant state behavior'. The real test of India's idealist foreign policy pronouncements came soon after independence when it needed to contest the ensuing bipolarity blatantly imposed by the two rival superpowers. A prominent case of forceful imposition of bipolarity came to the Korean Peninsula when a simple question of its independence from Japanese colonialism became a complex international problem. Having a superficial understanding of the 'binding constraints' imposed on its ability to contest great power interests in the peninsula, India tried to take a principled stand supporting the unity and sovereignty of the Korean nation. However, going forward, these binding constraints forced India to take major policy U-turns, including its support of the election, which was more or less certain to be limited to only one zone. By overseeing the process of the UN-mandated election on a zonal basis, India became a party to sowing the seeds of Korea's eventual division.

How could a democratic India not support the popular demand of the Korean people who bitterly opposed election in only one part of the country? An answer to this query seems to be wrapped in Nehru's mysteriously crafted 'hybrid idealism' that simultaneously incorporated nationalism, socialism and realism in its fold. It seems that Nehru's own class character hindered him from taking sides with the increasingly left-leaning popular Korean public sentiment. Nehru himself talked positively about socialism but in reality kept

open a vital escape-route for capitalism to flourish in India.⁴⁵ On top of his blurred ideological vision, Nehru's hidden desire to play a leadership role in the international system compelled him to move one step forward and two steps backward on crucial issues. Nehru's suppressed desire to act as a world leader was exploited by diplomats like KPS Menon who gave priority to his diplomatic career at the cost of Korea's legitimate national interest. In his book "India: Many Worlds" (1965), Menon himself accepted that deciding on the election in Korea was the first time in his life when his heart hindered his mind.⁴⁶ These foreign policy compromises weakened the Korean people's determination to stand against great power designs aimed at dividing their country.

It should be noted that both India and Korea, though, fought their own freedom struggles contesting colonial powers despite having virtually no contact between their nationalist leaders.⁴⁷ This missing Pan-Asian nationalist solidarity carefully distorted by the colonial-neocolonial administrations and theoretically managed by structural realism lies at the core of the fragmented nationalist assertion in the region. It is true that cultural, intellectual and religious contacts between India and Korea date back to the 48 A.D, but in modern times, these ancient contracts were lost under the subordination of foreign powers. Apart from a few marginal policy statements, there is no tangible evidence suggesting India's serious interest in Korea till the outbreak

45 While talking about socialism, Nehru allowed former kings and feudal lords to dominate the Indian parliament, who then diluted the country's fight with its grossly polarized socioeconomic past.

46 K.P.S. Menon, *India: Many Worlds: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1965). The renowned Korea scholar, Bipan Chandra, writes in a book review that "Menon barely disguises his warm relations with this beloved Korean poet Mo Yunsuk (Marion Moh), who also happened to be a booster 'agent' in the eyes of Syngman Rhee, a rightist if you will, who eventually came to head the new Republic of Korea in the South on August 15, 1948." Retrieved on November 30 2020, <https://pacificaffairs.ubc.ca/book-reviews/the-partition-of-korea-after-world-war-ii-a-global-history-by-jongsoo-james-lee/>.

47 Though Korean nationalist leaders met Indian poet Rabindra Nath Tagore in Japan where he poetically described Korea as the 'Lamp of the East,' there are no other instances of bilateral interaction.

of the Korean War.⁴⁸

These gaps in the bilateral contacts between India and Korea left a crucial space open for certain undue compromises in the management of vital foreign policy issues. Adding to this, neo-colonialism carefully pitched nationalism against genuine grass-root movements in Asia. These movements demanding economic equity and justice were often branded as communist movements. Sensing leftist inclination in these movements, the US military government in Korea took stern action against them. Nehru's own belief, that nationalism is much more potent than communism, made him maintain a safe distance from the left-leaning movements in Korea. Nehru himself was combating leftist movements in India, thus the scope of his sympathies and support to similar movements in Korea was very limited. As a result, Indian foreign policy toward the Korean Peninsula started to lose its direction.

4.1 India's Attitude towards the Korean Question

Carefully embedded in its 'hybrid liberalism,' India's significant reaction to the Korean problem came when a homogenous nation was tragically divided into two parts. In view of India's own traumatic experience of a partition, the whole nation felt unhappy about the division of the Korean Peninsula. India even withheld recognition of both North and South Korea on the grounds that the division of the Korean Peninsula was artificial. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru told the country's parliament that India declined to recognize either government in Korea officially because "... we felt that the division between North and South Korea could not last. It was artificial."⁴⁹

In the United Nations, India tried to make the two superpowers move towards a legitimate solution that would be acceptable to both North and South. The views expressed by Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, leader of the Indian

48 India's deeper familiarity with the Korean Peninsula begins with the Cairo Conference of December 1943 and expands during KPS Menon's chairing of UNCTOC. For details, see India, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 5 of 1950, pt. 2, August 3, 1950, col. 217-23.

49 India, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 5 of 1950, pt. 2, August 3, 1950, col. 222.

delegation to the UN, on 19 September 1947, provide a glimpse of the Indian attitude to the Korean question when she said: "Looming ominously over the whole situation is the fact that the Great Powers, instead of coming closer together, are drifting farther apart. We, in India, on our part, are aware of no compulsion to identify ourselves wholly, or to associate ourselves systematically, with either or any of the different groups."⁵⁰

A shallow understanding of western liberalism appears to have guided India's policy towards Korea. This half-hearted embrace of idealism created a wide gulf between real and imagined worlds. The realism hidden behind Nehruvian idealism was exposed due to aggressive interest articulation by the great powers. Sensing the emerging complexities, India concentrated its efforts on the task of enabling the United Nations to give a definite shape to the realization of the freedom of the Korean people. However, despite fierce opposition from the Korean people, India could not stop supporting the UN when the US used its influence to impose zonal elections on the Korean people. Indeed, a lack of direct political and economic interest in the Korean Peninsula made India maintain a principally consistent policy aimed at realizing peaceful reunification, but in reality, this policy went against the wishes of the Korean people. It is obvious that India helped the UN, but the UN did not help Korea.

4.2 India's Efforts at the United Nations

India was keen on promoting a workable solution to the Korean question, thus when it was placed on the agenda of the General Assembly, India took a position that was at variance with the Soviet Union. On 30 October 1947, in the first committee, Indian delegate B.R. Sen maintained that "article 107, which has been cited by the Soviet Union in support of its contention that the Korean question could not be admitted in the General Assembly, was not mandatory. India opposed the suggestion to postpone a discussion of

50 "United Nations, General Assembly Official Records (GAOR)" (New York, session 2, plen. Mtgs., vol. 1), 134 and 137-138.

the Korean question for an indefinite period.”⁵¹ It did not support the USSR draft resolution regarding the immediate withdrawal of occupation forces, rather arguing that such a step would, in the absence of the Korean government, create confusion in the country.⁵²

Here, India's stand supporting discussion on Korea in the UN General Assembly strengthened the US position as it had enormous clout in the General Assembly. If the Korean question would have been brought to the UN Security Council, chances were that the USSR would have vetoed it.⁵³ By opposing the immediate withdrawal of foreign forces, India in fact supported the prime objective of US foreign policy aimed at stopping Korea from falling to Communism. Moreover, India held the position that the American proposal, which said that the National Government, when constituted, should form its own national security forces and then arrange for the simultaneous withdrawal of the occupation forces, was also quite vague.

As a compromise, India suggested, on 30 October 1947, the following procedure: 1) general election should be held not on a zonal basis but under the supervision and control of the United Nations Temporary Commission; 2) elections should be held on the basis of adult suffrage without any political discrimination and by secret ballot; 3) the Korean Assembly should meet immediately after it had been elected to form a national government; 4) immediately upon its formation, the National Government should constitute its own national security forces and dissolve all military and semi-military formations not included therein; and, 5) a definite time limit should be fixed for the withdrawal of the occupation forces.⁵⁴

51 "GAOR" (New York, session 2, 1st Cttee), 285.

52 India, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 5 of 1950, pt. 2, August 3, 1950, col. 223.

53 B. C. Koh, "The United Nations and the Politics of Korean Reunification," *Journal of Korean Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 4 (January 1974): 37-56.

54 India, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 5 of 1950, pt. 2, August 3, 1950, col. 223.

India's position was actuated by its desire to reconcile the interests of the two parties with the aim to protect the basic interests of the Korean people. The US broadly accepted India's approach though it was not willing to accept the idea of a general election on a national scale. At this juncture, it was crucial that India should have supported the aspiration of the Korean people and firmly opposed elections happening only in one zone. In order to make India deviate from its stated position, the US suggested that India should be made one of the members of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK).⁵⁵ Nehru's burning desire to fall for recognition as a leader made India accept the US suggestion.

Ultimately, the US views prevailed, and a resolution was passed in the committee on November 4, 1947 by 46 votes to none, with four abstentions.⁵⁶ The American resolution was later accepted by the General Assembly too. The Soviet Union opposed it and refused to participate in the voting. The Soviet view was that no discussion on Korea should take place in the absence of representatives of Korea at the meeting. However, ignoring the Soviet objection, the UN General Assembly, in accordance with the resolution, laid down a detailed program for Korea.

Despite maintaining an idealist position on Korea, India failed to convince the United States and the Soviet Union to conduct a peninsula-wide general election. India's policy U-turn imposed an unbearable burden on the Korean people. Rather than firmly opposing elections on the zonal basis, India's KPS Menon chairing the UNTCOK allowed elections to happen only in the southern zone. Korea's long-cherished aspiration of sovereignty and independence was crushed under a totally botched election process. The acceptance of the idea that elections can be held on the zonal basis had its own politics, and India became party to that.

55 India's search for recognition and craving for a leadership role once again led to a serious foreign policy compromise.

56 "GAOR" (New York, session 2, 1st Cttee, Annex 16c), 605-606.

4.3 India's Role in the UNTCOK

The General Assembly created the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea. And, as a reward for making certain compromises, K.P.S. Menon of India was unanimously elected permanent chairman of the UNTCOK on February 4, 1948. In fact, India was tasked to manage the political fallout of the great power tussle in Korea. India's acceptance to chair the UNTCOK was a clear demonstration of its 'deviant' foreign policy behavior as its great power aspirations made the country fall for a leadership role rather than securing the territorial integrity of Korea. From its inception, the UNTCOK faced determined opposition from the authorities of North Korea which adversely impacted the commission's ability to discharge its assigned duties. In a statement to the Interim Committee, Menon explained how the UNTCOK was feeling handicapped in its work on account of the non-cooperation from the Soviet Union and North Korea.

India at that time possibly could not understand the implicit US design to forcefully stop Korea from becoming a communist country. Nevertheless, India's efforts aimed at reconciliation between the two superpowers bore no fruits. On the surface, this was due to the failure of UNTCOK to hold general elections in both zones, but underlying politics already set the stage for elections only at zonal levels. Menon expressed his sense of frustration on 12 February 1948 in Seoul: "In this task we have met with a major hurdle...38th parallel is still there, a blot on your map, a sword rending a living organism into two and making it bleed."⁵⁷

Some members of the UNTCOK felt that a Government established on the basis of a general election held only in one part of Korea could not be called the National Government of Korea. India was one of the countries which shared this view.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, in a rare compromising act, India was willing to go ahead with the general election in the southern zone provided it could be held in a free atmosphere. On May 10, 1948, the UNTCOK organized

57 "UN Doc. A/523" (New York, 9 February 1948), 7.

58 Richard John Pilliter, "The Evolution of the U.S. Containment Policy in Asia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Windsor, 1969), 86-87.

general elections only in the southern zone. There were marked differences among the members of the UNTCOK regarding the fairness of the election process.

On the basis of the findings and reports of the UNTCOK, India conveyed its partial acceptance of the general election held in South Korea. India still maintained that its primary aim was, as always, to unite the two Koreas. It, therefore, urged the UNTCOK to request the government of the Republic of Korea to consult with the government of North Korea and work towards the unification of the peninsula. But, these were only words. The situation on the ground was rather hostile to entertain any such idealist point of view.

On December 7, 1948, India's delegate at the UN, Setalvad, regretted that his country's objective remained unfulfilled. India refused to accord recognition to the Government of South Korea as the National Government of Korea and to authorize it to take over the functions of the administration as envisaged in paragraph 4 of the resolution of 14 November 1948. India's objective was not to obstruct the progress of the work but to promote the unification of the country. At the same time, India refused to accept the argument that the general election was fraudulent. It was too late; the US was successful in implementing its strategic objectives on the peninsula. Pan-Korean attempts by the 'people's committees' to form a united People's Republic of Korea could not get any support from the United States. Rather, it became a silent observer or a tacit approver of a brutal campaign against left-leaning groups or individuals in the Southern part.

India's last minute efforts failed to carry others on the reconciliation path. The UN General Assembly passed the resolution on December 21, 1948, by 48 to 6, with one abstention, declaring that "there has been established a lawful government (the Government of the Republic of Korea) having effective control and jurisdiction" over that part of Korea where the UNTCOK has been given access.⁵⁹ The UNTCOK was replaced by the United Nations Commission

59 Department of State, "The Record of Korean Unification 1943-1960" (Washington DC., 1960), 11.

on Korea (UNCOK). The United States extended its recognition to the Republic of Korea on January 1, 1949. Similarly, the authorities of North Korea also held elections in their region for the Supreme People's Assembly. A government named the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established under the leadership of Kim Il Sung in May 1948. The Soviet Union soon accorded diplomatic recognition to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

4.4 India's Policy on the Outbreak of the Korean War

When hostilities broke out between North and South Korea in June 1950, Indian Prime Minister Nehru declared in clear terms in the Indian Parliament that an "aggression has taken place by North Korea over South Korea. That is a wrong act that has to be condemned, that has to be resisted."⁶⁰ India supported the Security Council resolutions of 25 June and 27 June 1950. India did not wish to gloss over an act of wanton aggression by one state against another. However, India's involvement in the Korean conflict under the UN framework entailed the enormous political cost that Nehru was unwilling to commit.⁶¹ While considering reaction from a powerful socialist bloc within the Congress Party and the cost of overseas military involvement for a newly independent country, Nehru did not commit anything further against North Korean aggression.

The Indian cabinet, which met on June 29, 1950, gave its full support to Nehru's stand and approved India's decision to support the two Security Council resolutions.⁶² But, India opted to abstain from the vote on the Security Council resolution of July 7, 1950. By this resolution, the Security Council asked the Members of the United Nations "to furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attacks...and to make such forces and other assistance available to a unified command under

⁶⁰ India, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 5 of 1950, pt. 2, August 3, 1950, col. 236.

⁶¹ The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) operated like a caucus within the Indian National Congress, which compelled Nehru not to dispatch combatant troops against a communist country.

⁶² For details, see the newspaper *The Hindu* (Madras), July 1, 1950.

the United Nations.”⁶³ As India was forthcoming in supporting the earlier resolutions of the Security Council, its withdrawal from military commitments appeared to suggest that it was being hypocritical. Consequently, the West felt disenchanted with India’s deviant behavior.⁶⁴ In reality, India hesitated to involve itself in a military commitment against an Asian country.⁶⁵ By not involving itself militarily in the Korean conflict, which many considered as a proxy great power conflict, India attempted to create an independent direction in its foreign policy. Though, on humanitarian grounds, India made the decision on July 29th to send a medical unit to the Korean Peninsula.⁶⁶

Despite no military involvement, India, along with other countries, tried to prevent the advance of UN forces beyond the 38th parallel. It argued that since North Korea provoked the war by crossing the 38th parallel, the offensive should be stopped after those forces had been pushed back beyond that line. Moreover, India also did not like the resolutions approved by the Political Committee of the General Assembly on October 7, 1950. In its view, it was futile to make any attempt to solve the Korean issue by excluding China. Towards the end of November 1950, when the Chinese forces were fully engaged in driving UN forces back, India again attempted to stop the war through mediation by a group of neutral powers. On December 5, 1950, jointly with 10 other states, India made an appeal to China and North Korea not to cross

63 For the text of the resolution, see “UN Doc. S/INF/4” (New York, February 1, 1951), 6-7.

64 It was difficult for the Western countries to fully comprehend ‘binding constraints’ on a country like India which has to manage a number of princely estates unwilling to join the Union of India, wide-spread illiteracy and a large population of unemployed youth.

65 Nehru’s hesitant position to agree on a military commitment to Korea was largely due to his strong belief that war in Korea may not only be limited to the peninsula. For details, see Biswamohan Misra, “The Indian U.N. Policy during the Korean Crisis,” *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 25, no. 3/4 (July-September-December 1964): 148, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41854025.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A65d1abaa68214e80b264085b90848768>.

66 The 60th Indian (para) Field Ambulance Unit of the Army Medical Corps arrived in Korea on November 20, 1950 under the command of Lt. Col. A. G. Rangaraj. For details, see Ministry of National Defense, “History of UN Forces in Korean War, Vol. II” (Seoul, 1973), 468.

the 38th parallel. But India's efforts met with a rebuff from the communist bloc as well.

4.5 Armistice Agreement and India

It was quite some time before the United States and the communist authorities found their way to peace in Korea. The Indian proposal in the General Assembly on December 21, 1952 regarding the repatriation of prisoners of war presented an opportunity to the two parties to reiterate their demands.⁶⁷ The United States and its allies remodeled India's proposal to suit their own purpose, but the USSR and China out rightly rejected it. India, thus, found itself sandwiched between the two power blocs. It is however significant that both the communists and the non-communist blocs supported India's membership of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) though South Korea was not happy about it. India agreed to perform what turned out to be a difficult and thankless task of acting as Chairman of NNRC. Nehru told the Indian parliament as early as May 1952 that India was reluctant to assume any 'distant' responsibility.⁶⁸

Syngman Rhee was opposed to the armistice negotiations.⁶⁹ His only ambition was to secure political unification of Korea, and to his mind, there was only one way to do this. Rhee wanted the United Nations to mount a general offensive, liquidating once and for all the entire North Korean regime. When Rhee's plea for an all-out offensive went unheeded, he threatened to withdraw from the negotiations altogether. In order to defuse mounting tension, the US agreed to a mutual security pact with South Korea and provided economic

⁶⁷ The proposal made by India in the General Assembly on December 21, 1952. For details, see "Ministry of External Affairs, Report 1953-54," Retrieved on October 21, 2019, 17-18, <https://mealib.nic.in/?pdf2480?000>.

⁶⁸ B. Shiva Rao, "Nehru and the UN Security Council on Korea," (Extracts of Letters Exchanged between Nehru and B.N. Rau) *The Statesman* (New Delhi), December 6, 1965.

⁶⁹ For the role of the US in Korea and President Rhee Syngman's refusal to sign the truce agreement, see R. T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960* (Seoul: Panmun Book Co., 1978).

aid. On July 27, 1953, the Armistice Agreement was signed by General Harrison for the United Nations Command and by General Nam Il for the communist command. With this, the long war came to a close, though under a threat that the breach of the armistice would bring an extension of war beyond Korea.

Nevertheless, a divide created by the inter-Korean War and supported by ensuing ideological confrontation could not be resolved by the Armistice Agreement. It was only an attempt to acknowledge the emergence of global ideological discord. This ideological divide further postponed any possible resolution of the Korean question. In the absence of a peace treaty, both Koreas have been compelled to keep hostile posturing to face any war-like situation. India's foreign policy during those times though suffered from a number of policy U-turns but considering country's deeper involvement in the resolution of Korean Question, its experiences and proximity to North Korea can be utilized to formally ending the Korean War by a peace treaty. Only a formal peace treaty can be the precursor of a wide-ranging reconciliation between North and South Korea, which can possibly pave the way for 'one country, two systems.'

V. Assessment of India's Position on the 'Korean Question'

One of the original members of the UN, India took a principled stand and tried its best to vigorously support Korea's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nevertheless, its attempted idealism displayed at the UN could not deter the great powers from fragmenting Korean territorial integrity. As a result, the Korean Peninsula witnessed a painful national division, one of the bloodiest wars and suffered hugely under continued mutual antagonism. This misery and suffering of the divided families is embodied in the heart-breaking cries at the 38th parallel.

India's commitment to the non-alignment movement (NAM)⁷⁰ and the

70 NAM stands to "create an independent path in world politics that would not result in member States becoming pawns in the struggles between the major

country's wider civilizational ethos of non-violence were perfectly in line with Nehruvian idea of Asian solidarity.⁷¹ Nonetheless, real-world compulsions made Indian foreign policy to oscillate between idealism and realism. Suffering enormously under Anglo-French rivalry, post-independent leadership in India was firmly opposed to any recurrence of a world dominated by rival superpowers, but the country did not possess commensurate economic means to live with its own idealist world view. It was this idealism that made India firmly oppose a number of proposals initiated by both the US and USSR at the world body. From the very beginning, India was opposed to the idea of the 38th Parallel. India's unequivocal support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a newly de-colonized Korea often went against the interests of both the US & USSR, and at times, it also annoyed both South and North Korea.

India, largely engrossed in the doctrine of non-alignment, could not see the underlying maneuvering of *realpolitik*. Though, India earnestly tried to maintain an arm's length distance from artificially imposed bipolarity which gave birth to diagonally opposing identities of North and South Korea, but in reality, its policies at the UN remained contradictory. It is still shrouded in mystery as to why India agreed to head the UNTCOK and then agreed to elections only in one zone. Caught in its own web of compromises, India's response came in the form of reluctance to accord diplomatic recognition to any of the divided parts of the peninsula. It took a while for India to accept the harsh new reality that fragmented a small nation. Only in 1973, did India simultaneously establish diplomatic relations with both North and South Korea.

powers." See, *The Principles of Non-Alignment. The Non-aligned Countries in the Eighties-Results and Perspectives*, ed. Hans Kochler (London: Third World Centre, 1982).

71 'Third World Project' attempted to transform the structures of the neocolonial world-system based on East-West bipolarity and argued for 'neutrality' in world politics.

VI. Conclusion

This study confirms that India's principled policy towards the Korean Peninsula has been guided by its idealist vision of world politics. Having suffered disastrous consequences under Anglo-French rivalry, political leadership in India realized the true intent of great powers and tried hard to oppose it. Leaders of the post-colonial era like Nehru believed in the decolonization of Asia and the return of freedom and dignity to its people. These concerns made India seemingly act beyond its means which many considered as a 'deviant' foreign policy behavior. Deviant as it may appear, India clearly saw superpowers imposing bipolarity as the continuation of colonialism in disguise. Highly dissatisfied by the hollowness of structural realist accounts and its associated ideas of bipolarity that caused havoc in Korea, India invoked the dependency theory and its manifestation in the form of South-South cooperation to counter the great powers' hegemonic contest.

Indeed, Indian idealism lacked the political economic means to mount a prolonged contest to the great powers' intentions. Therefore, at times, India was forced to make U-turns in its foreign policy practices. Based on the philosophy of non-alignment, India's foreign policy was, in fact, an attempt to claim its stake in world leadership, but at the same time it intended to unite the powerless against the powerful. Nonetheless, South-South solidarity, which India vigorously promoted, could not develop any institutional competence to make any effective intervention in the international system. Despite India's persistent attempts at the United Nations, Korea suffered heavily under the dictates of rival interest articulation by the great powers. India's policy flip-flops amounting to 'deviant' state behavior had origins in its aspiration to lead the world but at the same time a stark domestic reality forced the country to seek economic as well as food aid. This alarming gap between aspiration and reality compelled India to make a number of difficult compromises. Some of these foreign policy compromises have contributed to reducing a sovereign country like Korea into a big question which still waits for a legitimate answer from the world.

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