

# York St John University



Barnes, Robert (2014) Britain and the Commonwealth. In: Matray, James I. and Boose, Donald W., (eds.) The Ashgate research companion to the Korean War. Ashgate, pp. 73-84

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorksja.ac.uk/id/eprint/1179/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<https://www.routledge.com/products/9781409439288>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

## RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at [ray@yorksja.ac.uk](mailto:ray@yorksja.ac.uk)

## Chapter 6 Britain and the Commonwealth

Robert Barnes

Britain and the seven other members of the Commonwealth of Nations<sup>1</sup> - Australia, Canada, Ceylon,<sup>2</sup> India, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa - all played, to a greater or lesser extent, a political and diplomatic role in the Korean War. Yet traditional accounts of the conflict have tended to largely ignore these activities, preferring to focus on those of the United States and battlefield events. As archival records have become available historians have also begun to consider the experiences of other countries with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) inevitably receiving the most attention. But a small, and growing, body of literature has emerged since the 1980s looking at the Commonwealth members.

There are a number of reasons why these countries have received relatively greater attention than other smaller nations involved in the Korean War. To begin with, Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa all contributed forces to the UN collective security action established in the first weeks of the war. While these contributions may have been small compared to that of the United States, they were offered sooner, and were larger and more effective than those provided by other UN members. Washington, as a result, had to pay at least some attention to the views of its comrades in arms.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the formal name for the Commonwealth and dates from the 1949 London Declaration when the word 'British' was dropped from the title. Throughout the rest of this chapter the organisation will be referred to simply as the Commonwealth.

<sup>2</sup> Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon at independence but changed its name in 1972.

Furthermore, the US government found it difficult to ignore the Commonwealth because its members represented its key allies in vital Cold War theatres. Britain remained America's closest ally, especially in Western Europe. Canada was a long-standing economic and security partner. US relations with Australia and New Zealand were more recent but had been bound in blood during the Second World War and they were seen as dependable friends. South Africa featured less in American thoughts but its staunchly anti-communist position was appreciated. Pakistan also was beginning to feature in American containment plans in the Middle East. Of more difficulty was the role of India in American thinking. Although Washington was extremely wary of Indian neutrality, the subcontinent lay between the vital Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian theatres and New Delhi held much influence over the emerging Third World. Consequently, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's views had to be taken into consideration.

The Commonwealth's importance was most clearly evident at the UN where it represented a numerically significant voting bloc. It also wielded much moral authority because of its multi-ethnic composition, its liberal-democratic traditions, and its close ties to various other groups. Still, within this forum most of the Commonwealth members were generally content to follow American leadership. But India and Pakistan were part of the loosely-bound 'neutral' bloc. India, in particular, had assumed the task of mediating between the two superpowers at the UN. Despite these differing perspectives though, common ground was occasionally found and the Commonwealth members united to achieve their temporary shared goals. The UN, moreover, provided a location in which Commonwealth representatives could meet regularly to coordinate policy. Such contact was more problematic through normal diplomatic channels given the vast distances between each member state.

Finally, even though Korea did not represent a vital interest to any of the Commonwealth members, many of these countries were closely connected to the fate of the peninsula. Before the conflict itself, Australia and Canada had been appointed members of the United Nations Temporary Commission for Korea (UNTCOK) in 1947 to try to bring about peaceful unification. Australia had then provided military observers in the months preceding the outbreak of full-scale fighting after a series of border skirmishes had erupted. Furthermore, during the conflict years, as stated above, Commonwealth forces were actively engaged in Korea while their diplomats were actively involved at the UN and elsewhere trying to bring the conflict to an end. Australia and Pakistan also provided representatives to work on the ill-fated United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK). And even after the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement India acted as umpire on, and provided the custodial forces for, the Neutral Nations Repatriation Committee (NNRC) formed to decide the final fate of those prisoners of war who refused to return home. Finally, the Commonwealth members which had contributed forces to the UN action participated at the ill-fated 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea.

Although the Commonwealth had its greatest political and diplomatic impact on the Korean War when it acted as a unit, the vast majority of the relevant secondary literature has had a distinctly national focus. Unsurprisingly, given its leadership role within the Commonwealth, its close relationship with the United States, and its continued global presence, Britain has received the most attention. In the 1980s, once official British records had been opened, a proliferation of articles and books were published by historians. The majority of these works concentrate on the first year of the

Korean War when the military situation was fluid and the risk of escalation was at its greatest. A strong early example of this trend is Michael Dockrill's article (Dockrill 1986) article. Dockrill emphasises that during the early months of the war the Foreign Office, with Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin at the helm, generally and successfully pressed the Labour government to support whatever course the United States' proposed so as not to risk Washington's commitment to NATO. It was only after China intervened in the conflict in November 1950, and as Bevin became increasingly inactive due to ill-health, that serious question-marks began to emerge over this policy. Dockrill stresses that throughout the 1950/1951 winter crisis Britain did have some success constraining US policy through Prime Minister Clement Attlee's trip to Washington to talk with President Harry Truman (discussed in greater detail below) and at the UN, where Britain worked to delay the passage of a US-sponsored resolution branding China an aggressor. But this influence was limited and when Bevin was replaced in March 1951 his successor, Herbert Morrison, failed to make an impact.

Covering the same period, Peter Lowe (P. Lowe 1989a) goes further highlighting the deep divisions between Britain and the United States regarding East Asian policy before the Korean War and the problems encountered trying to coordinate policy once fighting erupted. Lowe agrees with Dockrill that Britain had to be careful when criticising US policy but did play a limited constraining role through the Truman-Attlee talks and at the UN. He does though state that British criticism of the US commander of the UN force, General Douglas MacArthur, was the most contentious aspect of Anglo-American relations during this phase of the conflict. In another article, Lowe (P. Lowe, 1990) takes this argument much further, examining whether British representations in Washington were responsible for Truman's April 1951 decision to relieve MacArthur of his commands. Lowe concludes, nonetheless, that while British

protests did have some influence in Washington, the decision was, ultimately, Truman's alone and he removed MacArthur because of the constitutional challenge the general posed to the presidency.

In a further article on this period, Lowe (P. Lowe 1984) concentrates on the impact of the Korean War on Anglo-American relations regarding Japan. He stresses that during the post-war period Britain had generally supported the US occupation of Japan since its priorities lay elsewhere. Problems, though, had begun to arise following the Communist victory in China in 1949 that the Korean War then exacerbated. Washington now desired to build Japan into a bulwark against communism in Asia. London, in contrast, did not think Japan should be strengthened too quickly since this would antagonise the PRC and turn Japan into a threat to British interests. Yet the Attlee government was left on the periphery of negotiations regarding the Japanese Peace Treaty, demonstrating the sharp decline in British power.

Lowe (P. Lowe 1993) has also written on the impact of the Korean War on Britain's relations with the PRC. He first outlines British policy toward the newly-created Communist China before the outbreak of hostilities, stating that the Labour government wanted to build close diplomatic relations with Beijing in the hope of shifting China away from the Soviet sphere, maintain its trading partnership with China, and secure Hong Kong. Lowe argues that the outbreak of the Korean War did little to alter Britain's policy but following China's intervention, Anglo-Chinese relations disintegrated, talks to establish diplomatic relations between London and Beijing broke down, and British business was squeezed out of China.

Ra Jong-yil (Ra 1989), in contrast, analyses the development of British views on the unification of Korea during the autumn of 1950. Ra emphasises the tension created

between Britain and the United States on this issue since the latter wished simply to expand Seoul's sovereignty north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel whereas the Attlee government believed a new political arrangement was needed. He states that the British felt that the Koreans had shown they had not been able to govern themselves and needed 'tutelage'. Ra emphasises the racist and imperialist sentiments behind the British position and argues that the policy adopted by the United States was the only practicable solution given the swift military reversal following MacArthur's daring Inchon landings in mid-September 1950. He also stresses that Bevin did not press the British position given his priority to avoid serious disagreements with Washington.

Fitting chronologically alongside Ra's work is William Stueck's article (Stueck 1986) examining why Britain did not push harder in the autumn of 1950 to prevent UN forces crossing the 38th parallel despite the concerns of its Chiefs of Staff. Stueck argues convincingly that Bevin – realising Truman's difficult domestic position – had no intention of angering Washington at what represented the pinnacle of his efforts to solidify an Anglo-American alliance. Still, Stueck regrets that London's influence, which was brought to bear on Washington during the winter crisis, was not utilised earlier when it could have prevented Chinese intervention.

Peter Farrar (Farrar 1989) then examines Britain's immediate reaction to the news that limited numbers of Chinese forces had been encountered in northern Korea in late October 1950. Farrar argues that the plan put forward by the Chiefs of Staff to establish a demilitarised buffer zone some 60 miles south of the Korea-China border may have prevented full-scale Chinese intervention and allowed negotiations for a settlement at the narrow 'neck' of Korea. However, Farrar concludes that the British plan was initiated six weeks too late since UN forces were already north of the line proposed

and there was no way Washington or MacArthur would order a retreat. Moreover, he stresses that Bevin did not press the plan since he realised Truman's domestic plight following Republican gains in the recent mid-term elections.

With the British buffer zone plan unheeded, MacArthur launched an ill-fated end-the-war offensive that met head-on massive Chinese forces moving south. The UN Commander thus ordered the retreat and pressed for direct action against the PRC. This event sparked the most serious crisis of the early Cold War and led to a rapid deterioration in Anglo-American relations as London tried to avert a wider war with China. The most visible expression of this crisis was Attlee's decision to visit Washington in the wake of Truman's gaffe at a press conference in which he indicated that the use of atomic bombs was under consideration and the decision would be left to MacArthur. The resulting talks were first covered in detail by Roger Dingman (Dingman 1982) who believes they marked a low point in Anglo-American relations. But while Dingman argues that the Washington summit resulted in no significant agreements they did lead to a better understanding of each other's viewpoints, and that disagreements over East Asian should not jeopardise relations elsewhere. Rosemary Foot (Foot 1986) has also written on the crisis in Anglo-American relations that took place over the winter of 1950-1951. She gives a similar account of the Truman-Attlee talks but also stresses the important role played by Britain at the UN General Assembly in delaying the adoption, and bringing about the softening, of a US-sponsored resolution branding China an aggressor. In both cases Foot argues that Britain was able to influence American policy-making due its vital strategic role derived from its geographic position, military strength, and influence with the other Commonwealth members and Western European countries.



Far fewer works have been written on Britain's role during the second half of the Korean War but Peter Lowe and Michael Dockrill (P. Lowe 1988; Dockrill 1989) have made good contributions. These historians both argue that the British soon became frustrated over the armistice talks that commenced in July 1951. They reveal that London tended to blame the delayed negotiations on Washington's inflexibility and desired to have greater input. Moreover, Anglo-American relations deteriorated, despite the efforts of the new Conservative Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, over what action to take if the war in Korea later resumed and the UN Command's bombing of hydro-electric power stations on the border with China without consultation. Yet the issue that caused most friction concerned what to do with the prisoners of war in UN custody who refused to return home after the war's end. Initially Churchill and Eden wholeheartedly supported Truman's principle of voluntary repatriation. But as the war dragged on the British pressed for a compromise solution to this last issue preventing the signing of the armistice.

London first sought to achieve this end by encouraging Sino-Indian contacts but once these peace-feelers came to nothing and the armistice talks at Panmunjom broke down it shifted attention to the UN General Assembly. Here during the autumn of 1952 tense discussions took place between Eden and US Secretary of State Dean Acheson over a compromise Indian proposal to establish a neutral commission to take custody of the non-repatriate prisoners until their final fate could be decided. Importantly, though, it was the United States that backed down on this issue eventually opening the way for renewed cease-fire negotiations. Even so, Anglo-American friction re-emerged when the UN negotiators appeared to be stalling until they accepted the terms of the Indian resolution and the fighting stopped. Despite these numerous disagreements, however,

Dockrill concludes that Anglo-American relations were rather more harmonious during the second half of the conflict than during the first half.

A couple of historians have also analysed in greater detail specific events within this two-year period. For example, Callum Macdonald (Macdonald 1989) has written on the prisoner of war question and the Conservative government's shifting position on the principle of voluntary repatriation as the war became prolonged. Macdonald does not, however, examine the tense debates that took place at the UN General Assembly in the autumn of 1952. Roger Bullen's paper (Bullen 1984), in contrast, focuses exclusively on these events. Bullen argues that with the Truman administration in an extremely weak position following Eisenhower's election in November 1952, Eden was able to resist Acheson's pressure and force Washington to support an Indian compromise solution against its will. He argues though that the events over the next six months vindicated both sides. The resumption of the armistice negotiations demonstrated that it had been better to give priority to the Indian resolution. Whereas the fact that further negotiations still needed to take place proved Acheson's view that no final settlement could be found at the UN.

Moreover, a number of works have been written covering the British diplomatic and political role in the Korean War in its entirety. Peter Lowe (P. Lowe 1989b) wrote the first such study providing a clear summary of events and dividing his article into sections on the Labour and Conservative governments. Yet due to its limited length, this article is lacking in detail and there is very little on the origins or aftermath of the conflict. He concludes, nevertheless, that the Korean War demonstrated how dependent Britain was upon the United States and very few differences in policy existed between the Labour and Conservative governments. Lowe (P. Lowe 1997) also includes a

lengthy section on Korea in his detailed monograph on British containment policy in East Asia between 1948 and 1953. Lowe, in the main, restates many of the points he makes in the vast range of articles discussed above, arguing that throughout the conflict British policy was dictated by the overriding desire to maintain the 'special relationship' with the United States but had limited success trying to dissuade Washington away from impulsive decisions.

Callum Macdonald (Macdonald 1990) has also published a short but useful book on Britain and the Korean War. This work is more of a textbook than a monograph and is aimed at high school and undergraduate students. It is thus written as a chronological narrative. Macdonald stresses that the Anglo-American 'special relationship' relationship worked well in the early months of the Korean War but Chinese intervention brought the relationship to its lowest point before the 1956 Suez Crisis and made clear the inequalities of power between the states.

Anthony Farrar-Hockley has written the vastly more detailed two-volume official history of the British part in the Korean War. The first volume (Farrar-Hockley 1990) concentrates solely on the first six months of the conflict while volume two (Farrar-Hockley 1995) covers up to the armistice. While epic in scope, Farrar-Hockley, as a former soldier and prisoner of war in Korea, is more interested in the military aspects of the conflict. This work thus receives greater attention in Chapter 22. Still, the author does relate political and diplomatic events when they are relevant to battlefield conditions. For example, when analysing why the Attlee government decided to contribute forces to the UN action in Korea he argues against the 'false notion' that Britain went to war because it was politically or financially dependent on the United States. Instead, Farrar-Hockley claims that Attlee, haunted by British appeasement in

the 1930s, made the decision to halt aggression and prevent future Communist expansionism. The author, therefore, praises war-damaged Britain for committing forces to a distant conflict and the professionalism of these troops.

It is unsurprising that after Britain, Canada - the next largest Commonwealth contributor to the UN force in Korea and Washington's second closest ally - has received the most scholarly attention of the Commonwealth countries. But it would be wrong to say a significant body of literature exists concerning Canada's political and diplomatic role in the Korean War. Denis Stairs in an article (Stairs 1972) and later in a book (Stairs 1974) gave the earliest and still most comprehensive account of Canada's experience. Writing before official records became available and using mainly interviews with, and the memoirs of, key individuals and the public record, Stairs provides detailed coverage starting with Canada's appointment as a member of UNTCOK in 1947 up to the Geneva Conference in 1954. He pays particular attention to the policy clashes experienced throughout this period between Ottawa and Washington and argues that Canada became militarily involved in Korea for two reasons: to support UN collective security and to gain leverage so it could constrain the excesses of the United States, preventing Washington from channelling too many resources from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In addition, the historian argues that Canada's active participation in Korea through the UN did allow it a measure of participation in the formulation of allied policy. Yet Stairs does temper his claims stressing that Canada's influence in Washington was minimised by its relatively small economy and military establishment. For this reason, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester Pearson, sought to use Canada's ties with the Commonwealth and at the UN to add weight to its opinions.

Stairs' analysis has, however, come under scrutiny with the opening of the Canadian official records. Focusing on Canada's role in UNTCOK and the first six months of the war, Robert Prince (Prince 1992-1993) states that Stairs goes too far when he claims Canada wanted, and was at times able, to restrict American actions in Korea. He states that Canada was itself constrained by the need to safeguard its influence in Washington for more vital interests and by shared Cold War assumptions. As a result, Ottawa had to pursue policies in Korea it deemed unwise. For example, Canada was ill-prepared to contribute forces but did so under US pressure and not to support collective security. Likewise, Canada opposed crossing the 38th parallel in the autumn of 1950 but was not prepared to vote against the United States at the UN. Even the examples Stairs cited when US policy appeared to be constrained by Canadian opposition Prince believes other allies, particularly Britain, were more vocal while Pearson was extremely cautious.

A limited historiography of Australia's experience during the Korean War also exists. By far the best example is Robert O'Neill's massive two volume official history. The first volume (O'Neill 1981), looking at Australia's strategy and diplomacy from the origins to the aftermath of the war, adopting a chronological-thematic structure, is of direct relevance here. The second volume (O'Neill 1985) deals with combat operations and is discussed in Chapter 22 in more depth. In volume one O'Neill argues that Australia's approach towards Korea was governed by its quest for security despite its own limited military capability. It thus wanted to prevent a wider war; gain a military alliance with the United States; retain allied control over the future of Japanese rearmament; and to shift at least some of the Commonwealth's attention from the Middle East to South East Asia. Much emphasis in the book, therefore, is on Australia's, and specifically Minister for External Affairs Percy Spender's, handling of relations

with the United States and the founding of the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) Treaty. Moreover, there is significant discussion of Australia's relationship with Britain and the Commonwealth in terms of both global strategy and in providing a bridge between these countries and the United States. But for all his detailed analysis, O'Neill admits that, Australia's impact on the conduct of the war was minor and Canberra played a much less active role than other Commonwealth capitals in trying to constrain US policy. Finally, some attention is paid to the interaction between the Korean War and the home front, both in terms of politics and public opinion. O'Neill demonstrates that a political consensus existed over Prime Minister Robert Menzies' policy and the public was not gripped by events in distant Korea. The Korean War experience did, however, strengthened Australia's fledgling foreign and military bureaucracies and the role of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in decision-making. In contrast, the Labor Party was significantly weakened as Cold War tensions mounted.

The only other work covering Australia and the Korean War is Gavan McCormack's book (McCormack 1983) book written in response to O'Neill's official history. McCormack, a leftist historian, is deeply critical of O'Neill for ignoring findings in the revisionist literature despite the fact he only uses official records sparingly. More importantly, McCormack attacks the Australian government's use of the Korean War to pursue a security treaty with the United States instead of adopting the non-aligned policy its Labor predecessor toyed with. He states that this decision led to a dependence on Washington that dictated Australian foreign policy, including its involvement in Vietnam, for decades. He emphasises that Australia could have played a much more useful role in Korea since it was more involved than any other single country save the two great powers given the fact it was a member of UNTCOK, UNCOK and UNCURK; the UN Field Observer Mission in 1950 was staffed by two Australian officers; it co-

sponsored numerous UN resolutions; and it was the first nation to join the United States in committing forces of all three services. Furthermore, McCormack places greater emphasis on the domestic front than O'Neill claiming that the Menzies' government manipulated the situation to weaken the Labor Party and heighten anti-communism within Australian society.

Ian McGibbon's official history is the only serious consideration of New Zealand's role in the Korean War and in many ways mirrors O'Neill's work on Australia. McGibbon divides his study into two volumes: the first (McGibbon 1992) on politics and diplomacy; the second (McGibbon 1996) on combat operations. It is the first volume that concerns us here. Throughout, McGibbon argues that while New Zealand became partly involved in Korea in support of UN collective security and partly to demonstrate Commonwealth unity, its principal consideration was its own security. Like their counterparts in Canberra, Prime Minister Sidney Holland and Minister for External Affairs Frederick Doidge, therefore, worked towards a binding military alliance with the United States. Still, the author stresses that even more than Australia, New Zealand retained close emotional attachments with Britain. During the various crises created by the Korean War, Wellington thus tried to maintain unity between the Commonwealth and the United States. McGibbon, nonetheless, recognises that given New Zealand's small size and minor military contribution to the UN action it could do little to influence events. In addition, this work talks about the New Zealand domestic situation during this period. It states that the Korean War did not have any grip on the public imagination yet it did lead to a general shift to the right in politics, a strengthening of government bureaucracies, and affected the economy. In fact, McGibbon writes at considerable length on the relationship between Korea and the waterfront disputes of 1951, the largest industrial dispute in New Zealand's history.

Only Shiv Dayal (Dayal 1959) has written specifically on India's role in the Korean War. This fact is rather alarming given India's important role at the UN and in communicating with Beijing throughout the conflict. Furthermore, Dayal's account has a number of limitations. His book was written long before the release of government records and so is based almost exclusively on the public record. It is also a doctoral thesis in law and so is more focused on legal aspects of the Korean question than a historical study. And despite its title, it does not concentrate solely on India's experience. Even so, Dayal's work does provide a reasonably comprehensive study examining India's foreign policy objectives in the Cold War before tracing the history of the Korean question at the UN between 1947 and the 1954 Geneva Conference. Of particular note is the coverage of India's role as the chairman of the pre-war UNTCOK, and as the umpire of the post-war NNRC. Dayal's coverage, unsurprisingly, is very pro-Indian and he praises Nehru, the Indian representatives at the UN, Sir Benegal Rau and V. K. Krishna Menon, and others for their tireless efforts to localise the war and mediate between the superpowers. He states that the war would have ended much sooner if India's warnings regarding crossing the 38th parallel had been heeded; India played an important role urging a cease-fire following Chinese intervention; the 1952 Indian resolution paved the way for an armistice in Korea; India performed its post-armistice role with dignity under extreme pressure; and the 1954 Geneva Conference may have brought about Korean unification if an Indian delegation had been permitted to attend.

As of yet, no histories have been written of the diplomatic and political experiences of the other Commonwealth members during the Korean War. This omission is less surprising. South Africa did contribute a squadron of fighter planes to the UN force to demonstrate its unity with the United States. But the Nationalist government of Dr Daniel Malan had little interest in UN collective security, working



with the Commonwealth, or in distant Korea, and so kept a low profile in policy debates, particularly at the UN where its apartheid policies were much-criticised. Pakistan did play a slightly more visible role at the UN but was overshadowed by India and was careful not to antagonise the United States with whom it was building a strategic partnership. Moreover, Pakistan was unable to contribute to the UN action given its limited military forces were more concerned with threats to its own borders. Finally, Ceylon played no significant role in the debates surrounding the Korean War since it was a minor player on the international scene and was not a member of the UN until 1955.

Graeme Mount, with Andre Laferriere (Mount with Laferriere 2004), have made the only effort to examine the role of the Commonwealth as a unit throughout the entire Korean War. Yet even here the 'New' Commonwealth members are left out on the basis that they did not contribute forces to the UN action. India's important diplomatic role is thus ignored completely. In addition, the majority of attention is lavished on Mount and Laferriere's native Canada. This book is structured chronologically covering the period between 1947 and 1954 with each chapter focused on a specific question, or set of questions, that caused friction between the United States and the Commonwealth members. The authors state that the purpose of their book is to determine the value of 'Old' Commonwealth access to the Truman and Eisenhower administrations and, by extension, the potential value to Canadians of lobbying official Washington in a multinational forum. However, they start with the hypothesis that during the Cold War whenever there was a difference of opinion with the United States, Canada and its Commonwealth partners would give way since they lacked coordination and did not apply their combined weight. Mount and Laferriere stress that even those moments during the Korean War in which the Old Commonwealth appeared to constrain US

policy they simply confirmed the views of more cautious voices in Washington. The only real exceptions came during the winter crisis of 1950-1951 and during the autumn of 1952 when the Commonwealth united and the divided Truman administration accepted positions at the UN General Assembly it did not wholly support.

Robert Barnes (Barnes 2010) has also written an article focusing specifically on the Commonwealth's activities at the UN during the winter crisis when its members, Old and New, resisted Washington's efforts to have China branded an aggressor. Barnes argues that over a two-month period the Commonwealth united and was able to constrain Washington's policy and influence UN action. He stresses that Commonwealth unity only occurred under certain conditions: when the Korean War risked escalating into a global conflict; when key Commonwealth personalities were prepared to exercise their influence; when coincidence brought these Commonwealth personalities together in one place; and when the US government was willing to bow to Commonwealth pressure. This article first outlines conditions within the Commonwealth and at the UN before Chinese intervention. It then presents a detailed account of Commonwealth activity at the UN, in Washington in the form of the Truman-Attlee talks, and in London at a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference through the crucial months of November 1950 and January 1951. He stresses that Commonwealth unity held firm until the final days of this period when all the Commonwealth members, excepting India, succumbed to US pressure and accepted the aggressor resolution. But by this time the resolution had been sufficiently diluted and the military situation had significantly improved making it less likely military sanctions would be imposed on the PRC. Barnes concludes thus that a united Commonwealth could wield influence over the United States in the multilateral environment of the UN and did matter even in the deeply polarised world at the height of the Cold War.

Beyond these national studies, a number of international histories of the Korean War have paid some attention to the political and diplomatic roles played by Britain and the Commonwealth. William Stueck's two excellent books (Stueck 1995; Stueck 2003) are by far the best examples of this genre. Even so, Stueck is principally concerned with the three largest powers involved in Korea – the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. And while he does note occasional tension between the United States, Britain, Canada and India, he minimises the Commonwealth's importance. He does not think the Commonwealth members had the ability or will to significantly constrain American policy because of their small military contributions and desires to maintain close relations with Washington. But he does argue that Britain, Canada and India provided useful counterweights to tendencies in Washington that may have led to escalation in Korea, especially during the 1950-1951 winter crisis and in the autumn of 1952.

Rosemary Foot, likewise, in her history of American policy-making throughout the Korean War (Foot 1985) and her works on the armistice negotiations (Foot 1990; Foot 1993) does pay some attention to Britain although makes very little mention of the other Commonwealth members. She argues that London did have a moderating influence on US policy but claims it did little but reinforce cautious views that already existed. Even so, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations did try to negotiate with its closest ally but had to balance this with the usually opposing views of the President of the Republic of Korea, Syngman Rhee, as well as divergent internal positions.

Finally, Steven Lee (Lee 1995), in his international history of the origins of the Cold War in Asia, comes to similar conclusions. Lee provides considerable detail on British and Canadian efforts to influence US policy in Korea but claims they were

generally ineffective. He argues that London and Ottawa were extremely cautious since they did not want to sour relations with Washington. Lee does, however, stress that the United States did make some minor concessions to its allies to maintain a united front.

A number of useful memoirs have also been written by key Commonwealth personalities that provide some insights into the Korean War. From the British side, the most rewarding is Eden's memoir (Eden 1960). Eden devotes an entire chapter to Korea highlighting Anglo-American friction over the 'greater sanctions' statement and over prisoners of war. He pays particular attention to his own role at the UN General Assembly in the autumn of 1952 when he supported the Indian resolution against Acheson's opposition. Interestingly, only three pages of Attlee's memoirs (Attlee 1954) are dedicated to Korea, concentrating on the decision to send British troops and the Prime Minister's trip to Washington in December 1950.

Another useful firsthand account on the British side is that of Gladwyn Jebb (Jebb 1972), the British Permanent Representative to the UN between 1950 and 1954. Jebb provides detailed insights into activities in New York, discussing at length his heralded role in the televised spats at the Security Council in August and September 1950 between himself and the Soviet representative Yakov Malik. Geoffrey Warner's book (Warner 2005) containing a selection of diary entries and papers from Kenneth Younger, the Labour Minister of State during the first half of the conflict, also contains some good insights into decision-making within the British Cabinet.

In terms of Canadian personalities, Pearson's memoirs (Pearson 1974) contain two chapters on Korea that are very revealing. Pearson states that Canada's interest in Korea was based on its support for the principal of collective security and its hope, as a

'small' power, to use the UN forum to influence events and prevent a widespread war. The episodes Pearson pays closest attention to are those that he directly participated in: as a member of the UN Cease-fire Committee in December 1950 and as President of the General Assembly in 1952. Pearson also includes in the appendices his diaries from these periods. The memoirs of Escott Reid (Reid 1989), the deputy under-secretary at the Canadian Ministry of External Affairs during the first part of the Korean War, covers much of the same ground.

From the Indian perspective, the only relevant memoir is that of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (Pandit 1979), the sister and confidante of Nehru, as well as the Indian Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations and President of the General Assembly during the Korean War. But Mrs. Pandit only provides a short standard account of India's views on Korea. In addition, while Krishna Menon did not write his memoirs, his views on his role at the General Assembly in the autumn of 1952 are revealed in an interview transcribed by Michael Brecher (Brecher 1968).

Biographies written on Commonwealth personalities are the other category of secondary works providing useful insights into political and diplomatic dimensions of the Korean War. Yet it must be noted that in almost all the biographies mentioned below relatively little is said on this conflict and it is typically subsumed by other issues. As with the other literature above, British politicians and officials have received the most attention. In terms of the Labour government, Francis Williams (Williams 1961), Kenneth Harris (Harris 1982), Trevor Burridge (Burridge 1985) and David Howell (Howell 2006) have written biographies on Attlee paying at least some attention to the Korean War. Given his key role in foreign policy-making, few quality works have been written on Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. Alan Bullock's multi-volume

biography (Bullock 1983) remains the best but even it only contains a short section on Korea.

Regarding the Conservative government, very few of Churchill's innumerable biographers have focused on his views and actions during the Korean War. The only notable exceptions are Stephen Lambakis (Lambakis 1993) and Klaus Larres (Larres 2002) who discuss Churchill's views in the context of his wider Cold War strategy. Far more biographies of Eden pay attention to the Korean War, including those of Sidney Aster (Aster 1976), David Carlton (Carlton 1981), Robert James (James 1986) and David Dutton (Dutton 1997). Each historian talks at length regarding Eden's various run-ins with Acheson over Korea, especially their clash at the UN General Assembly in the autumn of 1952.

Moreover, some biographies have been written on key British diplomats. To start with, Peter Doyle (Doyle 1990), Alex Danchev (Danchev 1993), and Michael Hopkins in an article (Hopkins 2001) and then in a larger biography (Hopkins 2003), have analysed the role played by Sir Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador to the United States until 1952. These works all emphasise Franks' vital input in convincing the Attlee government to contribute forces in July 1950 and smoothing Anglo-American tensions during the winter crisis. Sean Greenwood (Greenwood 2008) has also written on Gladwyn Jebb, paying attention to his performance at the UN Security Council in the late summer of 1950, arguing that this eased tensions between London and Washington.

Concerning Canadian personalities, Pearson's biographers, Bruce Thurdarson (Thurdarson 1974) and John English (English 1992), pay considerable attention to the Korean War, highlighting his role in convincing the Cabinet to contribute Canadian troops as well as his attempts to mediate at the UN. Then on the Australian side, A.

Martin's (Martin 1999) and David Lowe's (D. Lowe 1999) biographies of Menzies rarely mention the Korean War. Still, they do both emphasise that the then Prime Minister viewed the conflict as a distraction from more important Cold War theatres. David Lowe's recent biography (D. Lowe 2010) of Spender is also of use but only one chapter focuses on his time as Minister for External Affairs and here the overwhelming focus is Spender's effort to create a security pact with the United States.

Finally, as regards to Indian figures, very few biographies on Nehru pay any attention to the Korean War. Yet G. Ramchandram's (Ramchandram 1990), B. Nanda's (Nanda 1995) and Benjamin Zachariah's (Zachariah 2004) works all contain short sections generally praising Nehru's neutrality and efforts to bring about the end of the conflict even if this drew Washington's enmity. The only other useful account is T. George's biography (George 1964) of Krishna Menon which provides a very positive account of Menon's work at the UN in the autumn of 1952.

Evidently, the political and diplomatic roles played by Britain and the other Commonwealth members during the Korean War warrant further study. The body of work dedicated to Britain is reasonably substantial but the stories of the other Commonwealth members remain only partially told. The official histories written on Australia and New Zealand have gone some way to addressing this omission. Also, Stairs' and Prince's works on Canada are steps in the right direction. Yet no studies of India's actions have been produced since the 1950s despite New Delhi's important role in bringing the fighting to an end. The fact that most Indian Ministry of External Affairs' records and Nehru's private papers are still closed does partially explain this

failing. Still, the author intends to fill this gap in the literature in a forthcoming article.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, no serious effort has been made to examine the interaction between all the Commonwealth members during the Korean War. Again, this is an issue the author hopes to address in a forthcoming monograph.<sup>4</sup> Hopefully these works will revive discussions on the British and Commonwealth experience so that this lesser-known aspect of the Korean War finally receives the attention it truly deserves.

## References

Aster, Sidney, Anthony Eden (London, 1976).

Attlee, Clement, *As it Happened* (London, 1954).

Barnes, Robert, 'Branding an aggressor: the Commonwealth, the United Nations and Chinese intervention in the Korean War, November 1950-January 1951', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33:2 (2010), pp.231-253.

Jebb, Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London, 1972).

Boyle, Peter, 'Oliver Franks and the Washington Embassy, 1948-1952', in J. Zametica (ed.), *British Officials and British Foreign Policy, 1945-1951* (Leicester, 1990), pp.189-211.

Brecher, Michael, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (London, 1968).

Nehru: *A Political Biography* (London, 1959).

Bullock, Alan, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (London, 1983).

---

<sup>3</sup> The author has an article entitled, 'Between the blocs: India, the United Nations, and Ending the Korean War', that will be published in the *Journal of Korean Studies* in 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The author has a monograph entitled *The US, the UN and the Korean War: Communism in the Far East and the American Struggle for Hegemony in the Cold War* focusing on US-Commonwealth relations at the UN during the Korean War, 1950-1954. This work is due to be published by IB Tauris in 2013.



- Burridge, Trevor, Clement Attlee: A Political Biography (London, 1985).
- Carlton, David, Anthony Eden: A Biography (London, 1981).
- Danchev, Alex, Oliver Franks: Founding Father (Oxford, 1993).
- Dayal, Shiv, *India's Role in the Korean Question: A study in the Settlement of International Disputes under the United Nations* (Delhi, 1959).
- Dockrill, Michael, 'The Foreign Office, Anglo-American relations, and the Korean truce negotiations, July 1951-July 1953', in J. Cotton and I. Neary (eds.), *The Korean War in History* (Manchester, 1989), pp.100-199.
- 'The Foreign Office, Anglo-American relations, and the Korean War, June 1950-June 1951,' *International Affairs* 62:3 (1986), pp.459-476.
- Dutton, David, Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation (London, 1997).
- Eden, Anthony, *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle* (London, 1960).
- English, John, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson – Volume II: 1949-1972* (Toronto, 1992)
- Farrar, Peter, 'A pause for peace negotiations: the British buffer zone plan of November 1950', in J. Cotton and I. Neary (eds.), *The Korean War in History* (Manchester, 1989), pp.66-80.
- Farrar-Hockley, Anthony, *The British Part in the Korean War – Volume I: A Distant Obligation* (London, 1990).
- *The British Part in the Korean War – Volume II: An Honourable Discharge* (London, 1995).
- Foot, Rosemary, 'Anglo-American relations in the Korean crisis: the British effort to avert an expanded war, December 1950-January 1951', *Diplomatic History* 10:1 (1986), pp.43-57.

----- ‘Negotiating with friends and enemies: the politics of peacemaking in Korea’,  
in K. C. Baum and J. Matray (eds.), *Korea and the Cold War: Division,  
Destruction, and Disarmament* (Claremont, CA., 1993), pp.193-208.

George, T., *Krishna Menon: A Biography* (London, 1964).

Greenwood, Sean, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the  
Modern World* (Leiden, 2008).

Harris, Kenneth, *Attlee* (London, 1982).

Hopkins, Michael, *Oliver Franks and the Truman Administration: Anglo-American  
Relations, 1948-1952* (London, 2003).

----- ‘The price of Cold War partnership: Sir Oliver Franks and the British military  
commitment in the Korean War’, *Cold War History* 1:2 (2001), pp.8-46.

Howell, David, *Attlee* (London, 2006).

James, Robert, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1986).

Jebb, Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London, 1972).

Lambakis, Stephen, *Winston Churchill: Architect of Peace – A Study of Statesmanship  
and the Cold War* (London, 1993).

Larres, Klaus, *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy* (London,  
2002).

Lee, Steven, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in  
Asia* (Montreal, 1995).

Lowe, David, *Australian Between Empires: The Life of Percy Spender* (London, 2010).

----- Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle': Australia's Cold War 1948-1954  
(Sydney, 1999).

Lowe, Peter, 'An ally and a recalcitrant general: Great Britain, Douglas MacArthur and the Korean War, 1950-1', *English Historical Review* 115:416 (1990), pp.624-653.

----- Containing the Cold War in East Asia: British policies towards Japan, China and Korea, 1948-53 (Manchester, 1997).

----- 'Great Britain, Japan and the Korean War, 1950-51', *Proceedings of the British Association for Japanese Studies* 9 (1984), pp.97-112.

----- 'Hopes frustrated: the impact of the Korean War upon Britain's relations with Communist China, 1950-1953', in T. Fraser and K. Jeffrey (eds.), *Men, Women and War* (Dublin, 1993), pp.211-226.

----- 'The frustrations of alliance: Britain, the United States, and the Korean War, 1950-51', in J. Cotton and I. Neary (eds.), *The Korean War in History* (Manchester, 1989a), pp.80-100.

----- 'The settlement of the Korean War', in J. Young (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration, 1951-1955* (Leicester, 1988).

----- 'The significance of the Korean War in Anglo-American relations', in M. Dockrill and J. Young (eds.), *British Foreign Policy, 1945-1956* (London, 1989b), pp.126-48.

Macdonald, Callum, *Britain and the Korean War* (Oxford, 1990).

----- "'Heroes behind barbed wire': the US, Britain and the POW issue in the Korean War', in J. Cotton and I. Neary (eds.), *The Korean War in History* (Manchester, 1989), pp.135-50.

McCormack, Gavan, *Cold War Hot War: An Australian Perspective on the Korean War* (Sydney, 1983).

McGibbon, Ian, *New Zealand and the Korean War – Volume I: Politics and Diplomacy* (Oxford, 1992).

----- *New Zealand and the Korean War – Volume II: Combat Operations* (Oxford, 1996).

Martin, A., *Robert Menzies: A Life – Volume 2, 1944-1978* (Melbourne, 1999).

Mount, Graeme, with Laferriere, Andre, *The Diplomacy of War: The Case of Korea* (London 2004)

Nanda, B., *Jawaharlal Nehru: Rebel and Statesman* (Oxford, 1995).

O'Neill, Robert, *Australia in the Korean War, 1950-53 - Volume I: Strategy and Diplomacy* (Canberra, 1981).

----- *Australia in the Korean War, 1950-53 – Volume II: Combat Operations* (Canberra, 1985).

Pandit, Vijaya Lakshmi, *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir* (London, 1979).

Pearson, Lester, *Memoirs 1948-1957: The International Years – Volume 2* (London, 1974).

Prince, Robert, 'The limits of constraint: Canadian-American relations and the Korean War, 1950-1951', *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27:4 (1992-1993), pp.129-52.

Ra, Jong-yil, 'Political settlement in Korea: British views and policies, Autumn 1950', in J. Cotton and I. Neary (eds.), *The Korean War in History* (Manchester, 1989), pp.51-65.

Ramachandram, G., *Nehru and World Peace* (London, 1990).

Reid, Escott, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid* (London, 1989).

Stairs, Denis, 'Canada and the Korean War: the boundaries of diplomacy', *International Perspectives* 6 (1972), pp.25-32.

----- The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War and the United States (Toronto, 1974).

Stueck, William, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Oxford, 2002)

----- *The Korean War: An International History* (Chichester, 1995).

----- 'The limits of influence: British policy and American expansion of the war in Korea', *Pacific Historical Review* 55:1 (1986), pp.65-95.

Thomson, Dale, *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian* (Toronto, 1967).

Thurdarson, Bruce, *Lester Pearson: Diplomat and Politician* (Toronto, 1974).

Warner Geoffrey, *In the Midst of Events: The Foreign Office diaries and papers of Kenneth Younger, February 1950-October 1951* (Oxford, 2005).

Williams, Francis, *A Prime Minister Remembers: The War and Post-War Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Earl Attlee* (London, 1961).

Zachariah, Benjamin, *Nehru* (London, 2004).