

1947 Historical Security Council

(1947 SC)

Research Report



Forum: 1947 Historical Security Council (1947 SC)

Issue: Addressing the Division of Korea and Preventing Conflict on the Peninsula (1945-1947)

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Introduction

The division of Korea in 1945 was both a significant event in the history of East Asia and the course of postwar order. Korea was liberated following Japan's surrender in August of 1945, ending a painful thirty-five-year colonial experience. However, the peninsula's liberation was soon obstructed by rising geopolitical dynamics when the Allied powers agreed to a temporary division of Korea (at the 38th parallel) without the necessary political and administrative frameworks needed for a clear path towards Korean independence. The Soviet Union occupied the northern part and the United States the southern part, eventually aiming to form a unified independent Korean government. At this early stage of division, rising levels of mistrust, diverging political models, and a clear duality of influence were already laying the groundwork for future conflict.

The transitional period from late 1945 into 1946 was characterized by an effort to salvage the future of Korea, emphasized by mistrust and uncertainty. The Moscow Conference in December of 1945 identified the subsequent roles of the United States and the Soviet Union, and indicated the possibility of the Allies forming a joint commission. Korean nationalists denounced the proposed trusteeship on the grounds that it would potentially slow down the state's independence. Each occupying force began building separate governing structures over locally elected leaders through ideological manipulation. Given the external agendas of both the United States and the Soviet Union, it was slowly becoming increasingly probable that Korea's liberation would possibly result in a permanent division of the peninsula.

Definition of Key Terms

People's Committees

Local grassroots political organizations formed by Koreans that were primarily leftist that governed small regions and towns, they were suppressed in the South, but embraced in the North.

Trusteeship

The highly controversial (specifically in the South) agreement by the US and USSR to maintain Soviet governance in the North and American governance in the South for five years until the formation of a unified Korean government.

38th Parallel

Formed in August 1945, following Japanese surrender in WW2, this line divided the Soviet-controlled and US-controlled regions of Korea.

Autumn Uprising

A large leftist revolt of peasants in South Korea in later 1946 that was heavily suppressed by the USAMGIK.

Background Information:

In 1910, the Japanese colonial empire, which had been in occupation of much of East Asia, annexed the Korean peninsula. Under this Japanese leadership, Korean political activity was banned, and a range of both external and internal movements arose. In China, the Korean Provisional Government was established, bearing a more right-leaning Western-like vision for an independent Korea, in addition to the scattering of large swathes more left-leaning, Soviet-aligned, Korean communists in surrounding areas. Within Korea, underground resistance movements began, some were centered around a leftist ideology, whereas others were more religion-based.

With WW2 ending after the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Korea was divided in two by a line known as the 38th Parallel. The land north of the 38th parallel, bordered China and the former Soviet Union and was placed under Soviet military occupation, whereas the land south of the 38th parallel was placed under American military occupation. This trusteeship was codified in the December 1945 Moscow Conference between the U.S, U.K,

and the USSR, and was intended to remain until the establishment of a unified Korean government as a proposed five-year joint U.S-Soviet plan.¹

Leading up to the implementation of the plans discussed in the Moscow Conference, Soviet and American approaches to ruling had varied significantly: In the North, Soviet Civil Authority allowed the organization of Korean communists, granting leadership to communist Kim Il-Sung in October 1945², also forming local groups known as People's Committees, whereas in the South, General John R. Hodge, head of the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), labelled People's Committees as "communist," and instead granted leadership to Japanese colonial bureaucrats, prompting Korean nationalist resistance.

This plan, however, was not without its controversy, and contributed to the division of Korean society. Leftists groups primarily based in the North, which aligned more with Soviet ideals and policies, accepted this plan, whereas more right-wing nationalists, primarily based in the South, saw this plan as an extension of the colonial rule they had faced under Japan. In March 1946, when the US and USSR convened to implement the Moscow Plan, work failed due to disagreements on collaboration with different parties. The USSR only wanted to work with parties in favor of the trusteeship, whereas the US wanted to work with all parties.

Causes of the Issue:

The roots of this Korean divide arise are primarily due to ideological differences in the peninsula, the primarily left-leaning communists of the North rejected ideals supported by the more right-wing nationalists of the South. Because of this ideological divide, and the counter-acting goals of the US and USSR to bolster their influences in the region, the two conflicting powers began supporting groups in the peninsula that aligned more with their goals, furthering the divide in the region.

Effects of the Issue:

In the North, due to Soviet influence and support of communist groups and ideals, there was a significant change in the process of the region's administration, and as a result, a significant effect on the lives of the country's people. The country adopted anti-Western

¹ "Why Are North and South Korea Divided?" *History.com*, 25 June 2018.
<https://www.history.com/articles/north-south-korea-divided-reasons-facts>

² "Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader." *Education About Asia*, Association for Asian Studies.
<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaas/archives/kim-il-sung-the-north-korean-leader/>

beliefs, a heavily communal economy, and a change in media and education. North Koreans were heavily subjected to communist propaganda entrepreneurship was suppressed. In the South, due to heavy US involvement and influence, there was also significant change. People were angered at what they perceived to be American colonialism, leading to heavy leftist revolts which were heavily suppressed. This led to a severe suppression and crackdown on any leftist sentiment within the region.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Provisional People's Committee for North Korea

The provisional government in North Korea at the beginning of 1947, ruled the land with similar left-leaning policies to those of the USSR, led by Kim Il Sung.

Korean Democratic Party

This party, which advocated for the institution of nationalist figure Syngman Rhee as a national leader, was based in South Korea with a more right-wing anti-communist agenda for Korean independence.³

USAMGIK

The provisional government in the South instated by the US following the Japanese surrender, was heavily criticized in the South due to suppression of Korean nationalism and institution of Japanese bureaucrats in government.

USSR

The leading communist power in the world, the USSR supported communist movements in the North in order to spread communism into the Korean peninsula.

Timeline of Events

(DELETE AFTER: Remember, if you are writing a report for ICJ or the 1947 Security Council, you cannot include any events after the critical date)

Date	Description of Event
May 8, 1946	The first U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission fails in Seoul due to Soviet opposition to the inclusion of anti-trusteeship groups in negotiation, both countries commit to building local governments in their respective regions.

³ "Syngman Rhee." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Syngman-Rhee>

July 1, 1946	South Korean Communist Party is officially declared illegal by the USAMGIK, and the provisional government begins arrests of suspected communists and leftists.
July 22, 1946	Lyuh Woon-hyung, a moderate South Korean nationalist delivers a speech warning against communist and American influence and advocating for independence.
August 28, 1946	The Workers' Party of North Korea under Kim Il Sung is formed, and becomes the ruling party of North Korea.
September 23, 1946	A railway workers' strike in Busan triggers several weeks of massive leftist peasant revolt throughout South Korea, hundreds were killed or arrested by the USAMGIK.
November 1, 1946	North Korean education systems are reformed, and the Japanese colonial-era education system is replaced by a Soviet one.
November 9, 1946	The USAMGIK begins the censorship of left-leaning newspapers and press in the South.
December 12, 1946	The USAMGIK launches the South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly, but elections are heavily boycotted by major political figures such as Kim Ku and Syngman Rhee.
December 12, 1946	The United Nations General Assembly adopts Resolution 39(I), calling for the formation of a unified Korean government via UN-overseen national elections, but the USSR rejects the resolution.
December 30, 1946	The US military that reports that North Korea now operates with full administrative autonomy under Kim Il Sung.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- **Military Agreement Between the United States and the Soviet Union on the Division of Occupation Zones in Korea:** Established the 38th parallel as the line that divided the Soviet military occupied North Korea and the American military occupied South Korea, this line eventually resulted in being the root of Korean division. (1945)⁴
- **Joint Communiqué of the Moscow Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the U.S., U.K., and USSR - Korean Trusteeship Agreement:** Proposed the implementation of a five-year joint trusteeship between the US and USSR in which the USSR ruled the

⁴ "38th Parallel." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/38th-parallel>

Korean North, and the US ruled the Korean South for five years until the formation of a unified Korean government. By May 1946, implementation had failed and both countries began working towards the formation of separate governments. (1945)

- **United Nations General Assembly Resolution 39(I): The Problem of the Independence of Korea:** This resolution called for the formation of an independent, unified Korean state through UN-supervised elections, but was rejected by the USSR. (1946) **(A/RES/39(I))**

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UN Resolution 39(I) (1946)

A 1946 resolution proposed by the United Nations General Assembly outlining a plan for UN-supervised national elections in Korea for the establishment of a Korean state, these plans never went into effect as they were rejected by the USSR.

People's Committees (1945)

Grassroots organizations that self-governed small regions in Korea independent of Soviet or American rule. In the North, they were embraced and eventually implemented under Kim Il Sung's leadership, in the South, they were heavily suppressed by the USAMGIK.

Possible Solutions

Solution 1

Reconvene the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission with the goal of a unified Korean state, and implement measures against the division of Korean society. Place less rigid restrictions on the Korean groups that can participate and allow for more freedom and variety in thought.

Solution 2

Repeat the process outlined in Resolution 39(I), and implement national elections. The key challenge here is Soviet agreement to this plan, as the Soviets had previously blocked this proposal. A way to achieve Soviet agreement is by promising things such as no restrictions on communist media and messaging in the South.

Solution 3

Establish a neutral provisional government in the region, potentially governed by a neutral country in WW2 like Switzerland, or entirely governed by the UN. Remove this government after the establishment of a unified Korean state.

Useful Links

Britannica - Korean Provisional Government:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Korean-Provisional-Government>

History - Why are North and South Korea Divided?:

<https://www.history.com/articles/north-south-korea-divided-reasons-facts>

Britannica - 38th Parallel: <https://www.britannica.com/place/38th-parallel>

Association for Asian Studies - Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader:

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/kim-il-sung-the-north-korean-leader/>

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