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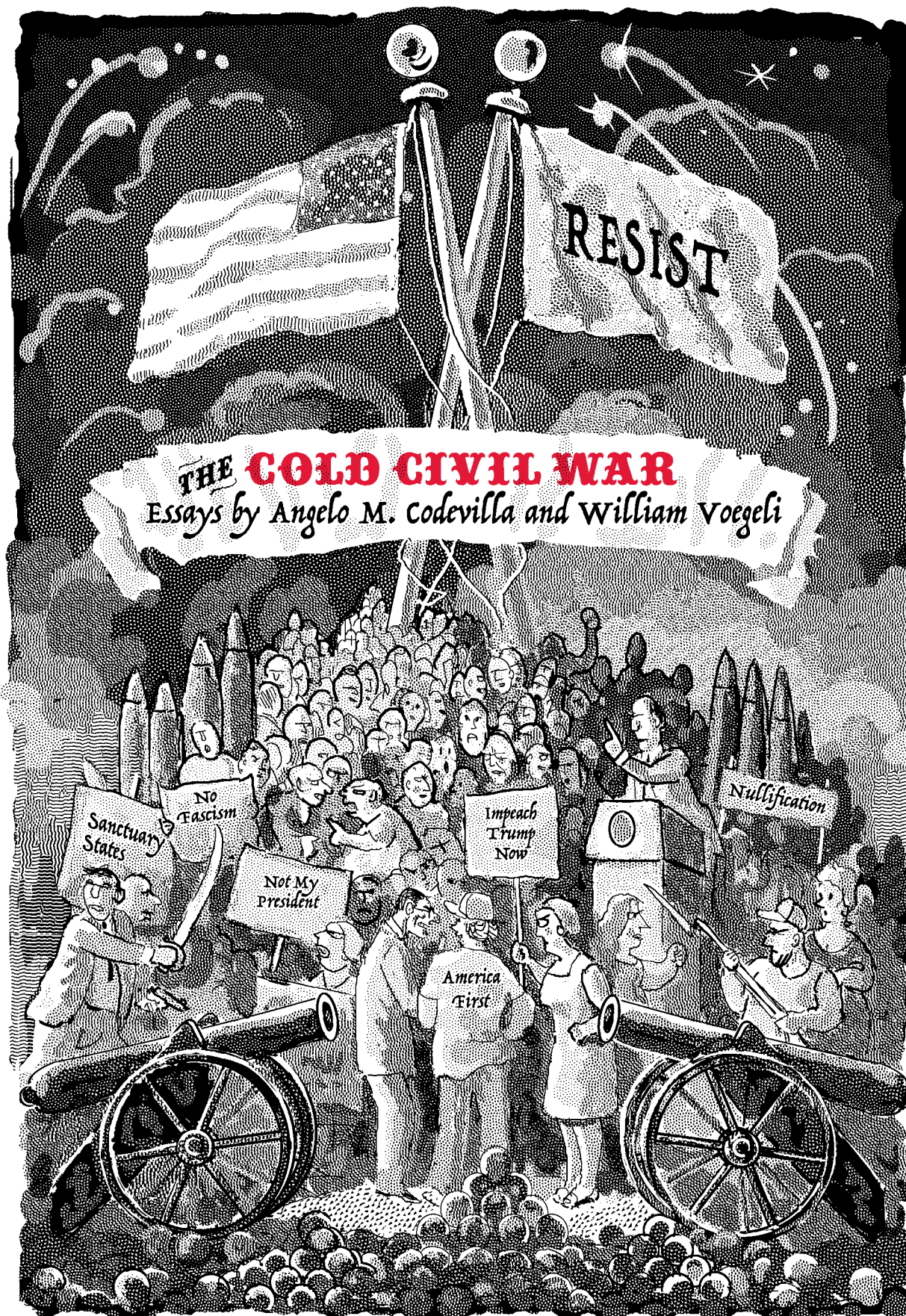
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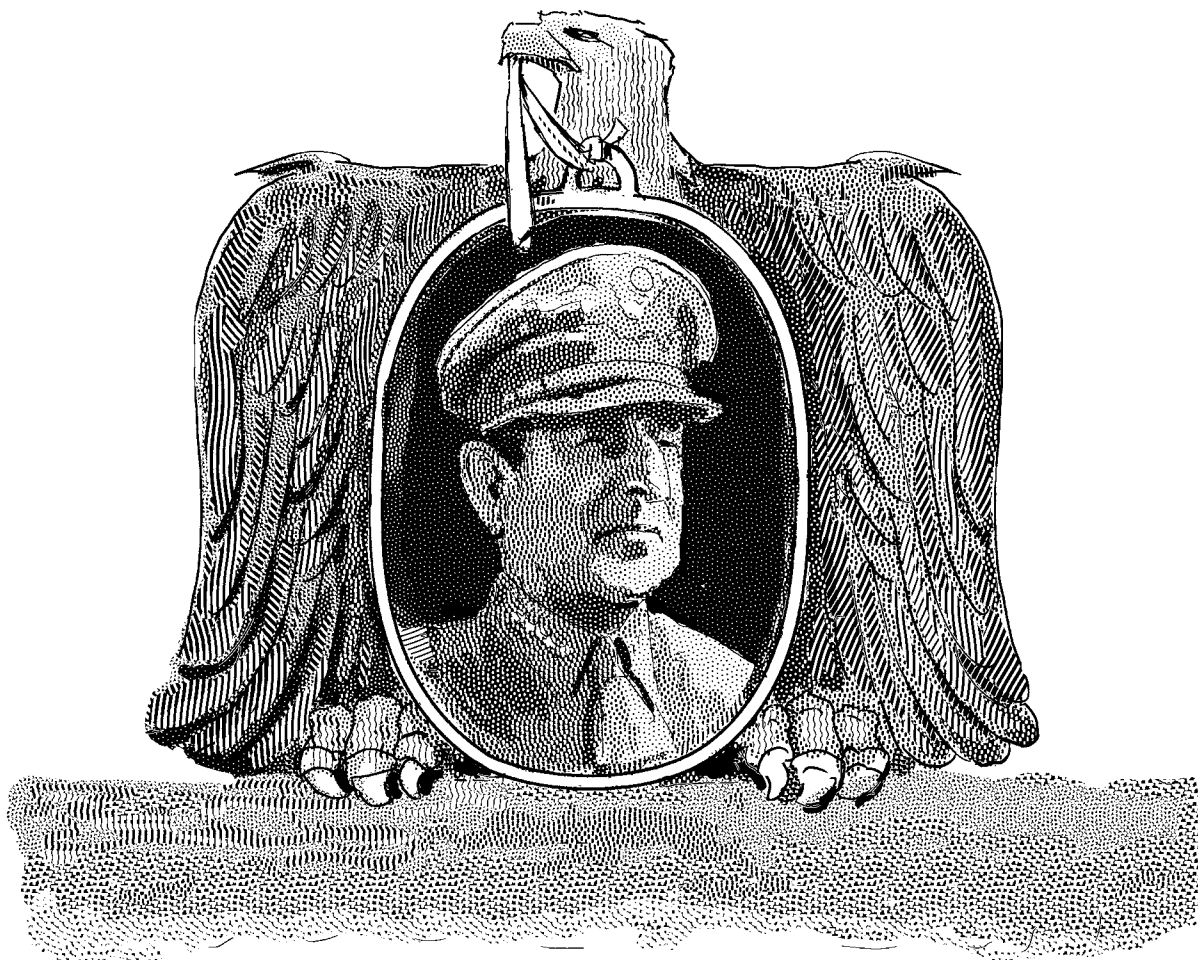


Book Review by Angelo M. Codevilla

THE TIPPING POINT

Douglas MacArthur: American Warrior, by Arthur Herman.
Random House, 960 pages, \$40 (cloth), \$22 (paper)

The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War,
by H.W. Brands. Doubleday, 448 pages, \$30



PROGRESSIVISM'S PERVERSION OF OUR ruling class's ideas about war and peace began at the turn of the 20th century. It prevailed in the winter of 1950-51 when this class, having committed the armed forces to war in Korea, decided to order them not to defeat an enemy that had already killed some 15,000 of their number, but rather to kill and die to "avoid a wider war," and to foster an international environment pleasing to itself and allied governments. Since then, the U.S. government has won no wars. More important, it has not sought to win wars. Instead, our foreign policy establishment has spent some 100,000 American lives and trillions of dollars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in pursuit of world order, multilateralism, or collective security. It has cited as a badge of su-

perior wisdom its trashing of Aristotle's notion that victory is war's natural objective.

Two new books by popular historians Arthur Herman and H.W. Brands show that the clash between President Harry Truman and General Douglas MacArthur over the Korean war's course was the tipping point between two eras of American statecraft. The clash is one episode in Herman's biography; it is Brands' focus. Herman, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, is generally favorable to MacArthur, while Brands, a professor of history and government at the University of Texas at Austin, is clearly on Truman's side. Both, however, give us a sense of how different were the human beings who had won America's wars from those who replaced them.

THE SHAPE OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY FOR most of the 20th century and into our own time was set by Progressive Republican statesmen, Elihu Root and Henry L. Stimson. They believed that military action should be pursued, if at all, for international peace and order, not to advance specifically American interests. Their colleagues—Andrew Carnegie, Nicholas Murray Butler, and David Starr Jordan (Herbert Hoover's mentor)—were outright pacifists. Democrats Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull (FDR's secretary of state for almost 12 years, longer than any American has ever served in that office), and *their* successors, Dean Acheson and Harry Truman, turned the idea of international order into realities: the League of Nations, United Nations, and

subsequent permanent alliances embodying “collective security.” That ruling Progressive consensus has determined America’s military objectives ever since, and largely deprived America of peace.

By 1950, polite society—which excluded the American people’s vast majority—was well-nigh unanimous that victory and peace, as well as the very notion of an overriding, peculiarly American national interest, were concepts that belonged to the age of the dinosaurs. Military officers however were mostly dinosaurs, the most prominent of whom was General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. His conquest of the western Pacific in World War II, followed by the 1950 masterstroke that reversed military defeat in Korea, had captivated American opinion. By firing MacArthur in April 1951, President Truman began to enforce polite society’s wisdom on the military. By the end of the Vietnam war some 20 years later, that wisdom about war and peace conquered the Democratic Party wholly, spread to much of the Republican Party, and to the senior U.S. officer corps, too. Hence, since 1951, America’s renowned generals—Matthew Ridgway, William Westmoreland, Colin Powell, and David Petraeus—have brought only stalemate, defeat, waste, and more war, while drawing down the nation’s reservoir of respect.

HERMAN’S BIOGRAPHY OF MACARTHUR describes a character who typified what once were America’s ideals and military ethos, as well as its fascination with East Asia and the exercise of military power there. It begins with an account of Douglas MacArthur’s father, Arthur MacArthur, who rose through battlefield promotions to command a regiment during the Civil War while still a teenager, married a Southern belle and raised his children mostly in the Indian frontier’s outposts, and culminated his career by defeating the Philippine insurgency in 1900. In 1882, following a suggestion from former President Ulysses S. Grant, Arthur wrote a comprehensive memorandum on the Far East’s geopolitical importance to America, advocating the creation of the position of military attaché to China...and his own appointment to it. The War Department refused. Not until 1905 was Arthur, by now a national hero and major general, appointed military attaché—but to Tokyo. As he came to know Japan, including a meeting with the emperor and the young crown prince, Hirohito, the newly minted First Lieutenant Douglas MacArthur was at his father’s side, gaining firsthand knowledge of the region.

From Douglas’s earliest youth, he had absorbed his father’s ideas and affections, especially for the army and the Orient. Douglas studied to beat out other contenders on the West Point entrance exam. Once there, he compiled a record second only to Robert E. Lee’s.

Commissioned, he sought to advance by conspicuous gallantry. His first assignment had been to the Philippines. Ambition spurs greatness. Often, this is a bloody spur. Douglas MacArthur endangered his own life promiscuously, while leading others to their deaths in pursuit of victory. Earning it does take a certain disregard for life. Herman’s examples of MacArthur’s willingness to expose himself to bullets in order to inspire others to kill and die take us from Mexico in 1914 to Korea in 1951.

IF DOUGLAS NEEDED A PARADIGM, HIS father’s campaign in the Philippines supplied it. Previous American commanders had tried to end the rebellion by using a mixture of carrots and sticks. Arthur MacArthur’s approach put the sticks first: enemy combatants fighting without uniforms (virtually all of them) along with any civilians aiding them, were to be executed summarily and their property forfeited. Within four months, the rebellion was over. Herman suggests that the senior MacArthur’s methods were akin to our era’s “nation builders.” But MacArthur’s mild measures came *after* he had crushed the rebellion—not in the middle of it. Why? Securing the peace you want requires the power to impose it.

While death is the military art’s means, peace is its natural end. In 1945, Japan’s delegation to the USS Missouri surrender ceremony should not have been surprised to hear Douglas MacArthur, who had orchestrated their country’s devastation, say, “We are gathered here...to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored.” Far from recriminations of the past, he spoke of hope for “a better world.” He showed what that meant by acting on his own authority to divert the U.S. armed forces’ massive stocks of food in the Pacific Theater to relieve the Japanese people’s near-starvation. Both MacArthurs also knew that peace requires mutual respect. That is why they advocated independence for the Philippines, and why Douglas went out of his way to respect Japanese institutions, exercising his military authority behind the scenes and returning the substance of rule to the Japanese as fast as possible.

Herman reveals the most about MacArthur’s character, as well as the American way of war, in examining the general’s relationship with Franklin D. Roosevelt between

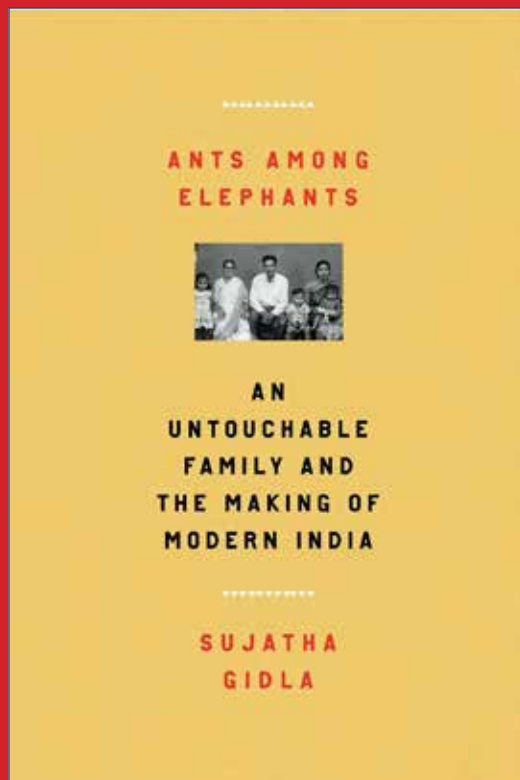
1935 and 1945, as well as with Harry Truman in 1950-51. MacArthur’s immediate preoccupation as the U.S. Army’s chief of staff from 1930 to 1935 was to save the officer corps from near extinction by a political system consumed by the Great Depression’s stringencies. In 1934, after Roosevelt had refused to rescind his cuts in the Army’s budget, MacArthur confronted him: when “an American boy, lying in the mud with an enemy bayonet through his belly and an enemy foot on his dying throat, spat out his last curse, I wanted the name not to be MacArthur, but Roosevelt.” FDR shot back, “You must not talk that way to the President!” Having done just that, MacArthur said, “You have my resignation” and headed for the door. Sensing the political if not the moral threat, FDR stopped him. “Don’t be foolish Douglas; you and the budget must get together on this.”

IN 1934, NEITHER MACARTHUR NOR ROOSEVELT could imagine abandoning soldiers whom they had placed in harm’s way. (MacArthur anticipated that the harm would come from Japan, and that it would do so in the Philippines.) Yet that is precisely what happened eight years later to the American garrison on Bataan and Corregidor. America’s political system had placed a garrison on the Philippines, then forsworn by treaty giving it the capacity to defend itself. More generally, it had so reduced the nation’s overall military capacity as to render impossible any timely reinforcement. After Pearl Harbor, it seems to have taken FDR a couple months to realize that, in effect, he *was* abandoning Americans in the Philippines to Japan’s tender mercies. As for MacArthur, even as he was speeding from Corregidor to Australia on FDR’s orders to take command of the South Pacific forces against Japan, he still held out hope of turning around quickly to rescue his troops with a massive force.

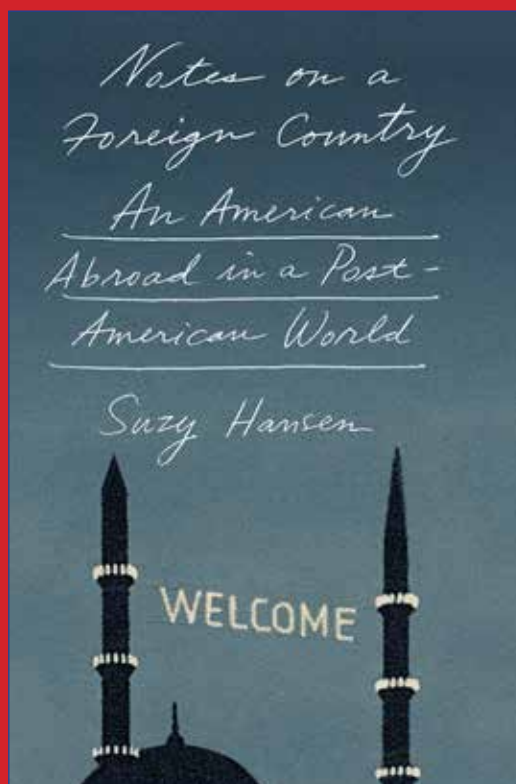
That rescue would take almost another three years of build-up and battles for countless Pacific islands, plus another confrontation with FDR. Herman’s biography dispels the illusion that U.S. strategy is formulated dispassionately rather than as the result of competing conceptions, parochialism, and personalities. MacArthur wanted to reconquer the Philippines at the earliest possible date, not just because he felt an obligation to its people and to his own troops, but also because he knew America had a powerful interest in restoring among Asians its reputation for reliability. The Navy, especially Admiral Ernest King, had other concerns. Moreover, the war in Europe was the U.S. government’s overarching priority.

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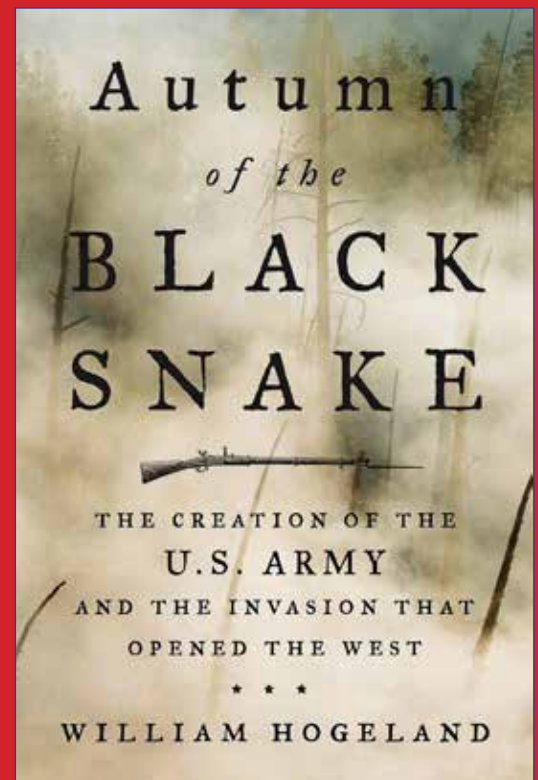
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The Pacific theater's political-military brass met in June 1944 to make their respective cases to the president. After the meeting, MacArthur asked to see Roosevelt alone, briefly. In Herman's account, MacArthur says,

Mr. President, the country has forgiven you for what took place on Bataan.... But the nation will never forgive you if you approve a plan that leaves 17 million Christian American subjects to wither in the Philippines under the conqueror's heel.... Politically, it would ruin you.

The general got what he wanted because he knew the president well enough to blackmail him politically—as well as to respect him.

BRANDS PORTRAYS HARRY S. TRUMAN as an average American possessed of common sense and eager to do the right thing—hardscrabble childhood, artillery service in the Great War that was creditable if unspectacular, faithful husband and father, small-town businessman always on the edge, a wheelhorse in the Missouri political machine of Boss Tom Pendergast, raised by it to the United States Senate. Franklin Roosevelt had insisted that Truman, a conservative Southerner, be his V.P. in 1944 because his administration had already given liberal, technocratic Northerners more power in the Democratic Party than was good for the party or for the country. Choosing Truman would help the party in the upcoming election and brake its leftward drift. But Truman had neither the knowledge nor the intention of steering the party or the country in a different direction. Conscious of his own inadequacies in the face of problems that were bigger than he, Truman deferred to the men who had surrounded the great Roosevelt.

Truman had no trouble becoming the leader of the free world's resistance to Communism. The Soviet Union's belligerent rapacity after World War II had forced Truman's hand, ruining New Dealers' dreams—and, in the case of double agents like Alger Hiss, dark schemes—of a Soviet-American condominium of the world. But nothing had forced Truman to reconsider the Democrats' and the whole foreign policy establishment's heavy bet on the United Nations. Moreover, on an instinctive partisan basis, Truman defended his foreign policy officials against Republicans who attacked them for being soft on Communism in Europe and for having facilitated Mao's victory in China. Not least, ever conscious of his humble personal standing, Harry Truman was sensitive to what he regarded as

anybody's slighting of his authority as president, and had a chip on his shoulder about people with exalted reputations. "Five-star MacArthur," not only eminent but a Republican, was at the head of that list.

FOR HIS PART, MACARTHUR NEITHER knew nor respected Truman. Moreover, he did not grasp the changes that had taken place in the attitudes of the ruling class's Democratic contingent, by comparison with whom Franklin Roosevelt would have been counted as a tough-minded traditionalist. MacArthur ended up surprised by Truman's refusal to prosecute the Korean war to victory even more than he had been surprised by Roosevelt's abandonment of the Philippine garrison. For him, such passivity was against the logic of command, as well as being immoral.

Truman and his advisers clashed with MacArthur over Korea, deepening the divide between the ruling class, led by the Democratic Party, and the rest of the coun-

Some three fourths of the Americans killed in Korea died after the U.S. government stopped trying to win the war.

try. Herman and Brands agree that the tension between Truman and MacArthur reflected semi-articulated differences among Washington elites about America's objective in Korea. The "containment doctrine" called for America to make sure that the Communist side should lose rather than gain from any attempt at expansion. Besides, North Korea—along with Stalin and Mao—had started a war that was killing Americans. MacArthur, like nearly all Americans, believed there was every reason to win that war by liberating all of Korea.

But some, especially in the Democratic Party, argued that America's interest in avoiding "a wider war" trumped its interest in winning the current one. That argument had a partisan as well as an intellectual basis: America's trump cards against China included enabling Chinese nationalist forces on Taiwan to start a second front against Mao Zedong, and the threat to use atomic weapons. (The next president, Dwight Eisenhower, would commend them as a "bigger bang

for the buck" and end the Korean war by preparing to use them.) But Democrats had made opposition to the Chinese Nationalists part of their political identity, and were in the process of doing the same with opposition to using nuclear weapons. MacArthur, however, could imagine neither fighting a war for any purpose other than victory, nor refusing to employ whatever weapons would bring victory most directly.

BRANDS'S INTRODUCTION LEADS THE reader to expect the standard establishment account: MacArthur's insubordinate recklessness brought China into the Korean war. Had it not been for Truman's steady wisdom the haughty general would have plunged America and the world into a nuclear holocaust. (The 1999 PBS *American Experience* documentary "MacArthur" made this case.) But the book's account of the half-year process by which Secretary of State Dean Acheson and General Omar Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, led Truman imperceptibly to switch his priority to theirs reads like Iago's turning of Othello. Relentless indirection and innuendo, which played on personal foibles, preempted fundamental choice.

China policy was always the key. Truman's instinctive priority, "stopping the Communists," rested on the nation's most renowned soldier, MacArthur, who commanded U.S. forces in the region. Truman's early, spontaneous, statements to the press might as well have been written by the general. What would Truman use to stop the Commies? Whatever it takes. Even atom bombs? Whatever it takes. How about Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist troops from Taiwan? Possibly. But Acheson and Bradley's priorities were to safeguard their now tattered Far East foreign policy, the U.N., and relationships with Clement Attlee and Jawaharlal Nehru, prime ministers of Great Britain and India, respectively. Because Truman was never clear in his own mind about his options in Korea and the consequences of each, it became possible for Acheson and Bradley to advance their preferred ends and means by fueling a feud with MacArthur.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded across the 38th parallel with China's very substantial support and Stalin's encouragement. Within hours, the advisory group that Acheson convened concluded that America's first priority was to place the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait to prevent Chiang Kai-shek from using the opportunity to attack Mao. Two days later, Truman made it official, describing the move, more innocently than in-



sincerely, as primarily to protect Chiang from Mao. Brands writes that Acheson was trying to reassure Mao that America had no hostile intentions toward his regime. He succeeded all too well.

ON JULY 31, MACARTHUR CONFERRED with Chiang on orders from the Joint Chiefs. The prestige press, “backgrounded” by the foreign policy establishment, accused MacArthur of having planned all manner of joint action with the Nationalists against the Communists. The general’s own communique had said no such thing. Truman, pressed, said that he and MacArthur were “in perfect agreement,” but denied that anyone was trying to divide him from his general.

The seeds were germinating. When the Veterans of Foreign Wars invited MacArthur to address their national convention at the end of August, the general sent a statement which, *inter alia*, said that were Taiwan to be controlled by an unfriendly power, it would be a threat to American security as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender.” “Nothing could be more fallacious,” he wrote, “than the threadbare argument by those who advocate appeasement and defeatism in the Pacific that if we defend Formosa

we alienate continental Asia. Those who speak thus do not understand the Orient.” According to Brands, Acheson told Truman’s secretary of defense that “the matter raised the issue as to who is the President of the United States.” More pointedly, though Truman agreed with everything MacArthur had said, he was “infuriated” that MacArthur “had arrogated to himself the right to say it.” Evidently, the latter meant so much more to Truman than his agreement with the substance of MacArthur’s words that, in retrospect, he said, “That’s the day I should have fired him.”

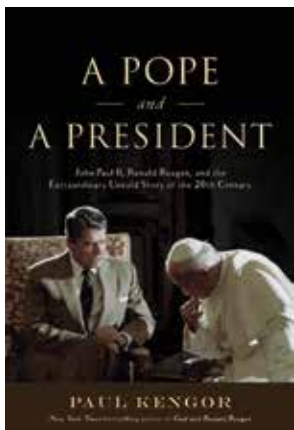
BUT FIRE HIM FOR WHAT? AND WHY DID he not do it? There was a war going on. Americans were dying defending the Pusan perimeter on the Korean peninsula’s southern tip. MacArthur was two weeks away from an operation that would relieve them and reverse the war’s tide—an operation that Truman had approved against the Washington establishment’s unanimous advice. The president had no objection to what MacArthur was doing in Korea. It was clear enough that the Republican general was at odds with the Democratic Party’s overall foreign policy. But Truman’s political and personal partisan sentiments were not strong enough for him

to eclipse substantive concern for the Korean war’s outcome. Not yet.

Thanks to MacArthur’s September landing of a corps of U.S. Army and Marines at Inchon in the rear of North Korean forces, North Korea’s army practically disintegrated. Nothing stood in the way of America’s victory. Truman summoned MacArthur to a meeting on Wake Island on October 15. MacArthur, seeing it as a pre-election photo op, treated it, and Truman, with transparent contempt. The Washington contingent bristled. The conferees discussed the possibility of China’s intervention, agreed it was unlikely, and that the U.S. had ample forces to deal with whatever the Chinese might bring. Herman sums up the mutually antagonistic mindset with which MacArthur and the Washington insiders left Wake: “Each expected, and was waiting for, the other to make a misstep, and all were focused on how they could correct the error when it came.”

Once the danger of Americans being slaughtered and driven into the sea had passed, the unresolved question of war aims had become salient. In September a National Security Council paper stated, “The political objective of the United Nations in Korea is to bring about the complete independence and unity of Korea.” But it added a caveat:

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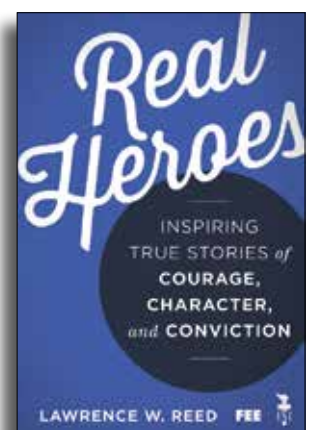
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If the present United Nations action in Korea can accomplish this objective without substantial risk of general war with the Soviet Union or Communist China, it would be in our interest to advocate the pressing of the United Nations action to this conclusion. It would not be in our national interest...to take action in Korea which would involve a substantial risk of general war.

Further, "In no circumstances should other U.N. forces be used in the northeastern province bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border." Where that left the commander of U.S. forces in Korea was anyone's guess.

TRUMAN, FOLLOWING ACHESON, URGED MacArthur not to threaten the Soviets and Chinese militarily in Korea, while keeping before them "the recklessness of active intervention on their part." No one hinted how that might be done without posing a threat to them. In fact, on October 8 Truman authorized MacArthur to occupy land north of the 38th parallel. Three generations of progressives have argued that the Chinese army's massive intrusion into Korea (the first encounter occurred on October 21 some 50 miles south of the Yalu River border) was due to MacArthur's order to his troops on October 24 to secure all of Korea. Why had Mao mustered a half million men and their equipment to China's remotest northeast in the first place? How many months had it taken him to do it?

In fact, Acheson and his foreign policy establishment's view of Mao had been mistaken all along. Mao intended for his side to win—with North Korean troops if possible, with Chinese ones if need be. The CIA, estimating that China would not invade, got it wrong as always. But the *New York Times's* high-level sources knew whom to blame for the "wider war." Brands writes that columnist James Reston became their voice: MacArthur had persuaded Truman against his better judgment to let U.S. troops approach China. Truman had gone along because crossing MacArthur before the congressional elections would have been disastrous. Now things would change. Truman told everyone, including Clement Attlee, that the Chinese had "proved [MacArthur] wrong," and that from now on the general was "on a short leash."

Herman, not Brands, describes what that leash meant in terms of military operations. MacArthur's calm in the face of possible, then actual, Chinese intervention had been due to his faith in the overwhelming

air power at his command. With it, he could isolate the battlefield, starving, disarming, and decimating his opponents. But restriction on the use of American airpower was the first of the jerks on the leash. Pilots ordered to bomb bridges on the twisting Yalu, were forbidden from crossing Chinese territory, leaving them unable to reach some of the most important bridges at all. The routes to others were so predictable that the pilots were exposed to massive anti-aircraft attacks. Without the air support they had counted on, American troops were unable to halt the Chinese advance until well south of the 38th parallel. What should American troops do in such a quandary, also lacking authorization to use control of the sea to strike behind enemy lines?

WASHINGTON'S "RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS," up to and including Truman, refused to take responsibility for ordering any course of action whatever. Brands gives the fuller account. MacArthur, the option of victory having been denied, asked, "Is the present objective of United States political policy to maintain a military position in Korea—indefinitely, for a limited time, or to minimize losses by evacuation as soon as it can be accomplished?" Brands writes, "Dean Acheson read MacArthur's letter with astonishment," saying afterwards that MacArthur was "incurably recalcitrant and basically disloyal to the purposes of his commander in chief." But what were these purposes, and how did they translate into how and why American draftees were dying?

Truman, on advice of his counselors, had resisted bipartisan calls for a declaration of war. Such a request would have forced his administration to define and submit its objectives to a vote by both Houses of Congress. But by creating the fiction that the war was by, of, and for the United Nations, Truman et al. believed they were gaining flexibility, which is of great strategic value—but only to leaders who know what they're doing. But Truman and his advisors did not, so their flexibility and disunity acted like a sail in the winds of events.

Truman, after convening the National Security Council, also chose not to answer MacArthur's request for orders. "This present telegram is not to be taken in any sense as a directive. Its purpose is to give you something of what is in our minds." U.S. troops' successful resistance would demonstrate that aggression does not pay and would encourage others to believe in America's pledges of assistance. "We recognize, of course, that continued resistance might not be militarily possible with

the limited forces with which you are being called upon to meet large Chinese armies...if we must withdraw from Korea, it [must] be clear to the world that that course is forced upon us by military necessity." Translated from bureaucratese, the message was: hold on with the forces and restrictions you've got, regardless of how many American lives it costs.

And cost it did. Some three fourths of the Americans killed in Korea died after the U.S. government stopped trying to win the war. Since Truman's decision taught the world that no-win wars were now the American ruling class's *modus operandi*, the cost of three later generations' wars, including the incalculable toll of domestic decay resulting from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, should also be added in.

THE NOVEMBER 1950 ELECTIONS HAD repudiated Democratic foreign policy. Democrats retained narrow majorities on Capitol Hill, but lost 28 seats in the House and five in the Senate. On March 20, 1951, Douglas MacArthur had answered a private letter from Republican Representative Joseph Martin, the House minority leader, seeking his views on opening a Chinese Nationalist front against China's effort in Korea. On April 5, Martin read MacArthur's answer from the House floor. The Truman Administration chose to see this as something akin to a military coup, and fired MacArthur in the name of civilian supremacy. In fact, however, MacArthur had become a clear and present danger not to the U.S. Constitution, but to the preferences and reputations of the Democratic Party's foreign policy apparatchiks, and to Truman's ego—domestic politics writ small.

MacArthur returned from Korea to a conquering hero's reception: ticker-tape parades and a speech to a joint session of Congress. The pledge he made and kept to "just fade away" belied the contention that he had tried to usurp the Constitution, and bolstered the two warnings he left his fellow citizens. First, "In war, there is no substitute for victory." Forgetting something so very basic had been no mere mistake, but a symptom of moral decay. Hence his other warning: "History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual awakening to overcome the moral lapse, or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster."

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