

## **I. Introduction**

In most of the academic literature since the introduction of the security dilemma by John Herz and Herbert Butterfield in 1950-51, the concept has been dominated by neorealist scholars such as Robert Jervis, Ken Waltz, Charles Glaser and John Mearsheimer. Yet, with the end of the Cold War, a growing body of literature has chosen to approach the subject from perspective of constructivism, underlining how the notion of paradoxical security competition between defensively-minded states is itself a socially-constructed antagonistic relationship. Furthermore, critical constructivists have underlined the role of language in giving meaning to such antagonistic relationships in international politics.

This paper seeks to build on the critical constructivist approach to analysing the security dilemma, and argues that the language of policymakers is crucial in giving meaning to interaction between states. Seen in this light, the author contends that discourse analysis of the US intervention in response to the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950, in invoking the legacy of 1930s appeasement of Nazi Germany and how this failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War, is instructive in delineating the processes through which the Truman Administration came to identify North Korea as part of a monolithic communist bloc that had to be deterred, lest the pattern of events of the 1930s be replayed within the context of the Cold War.

## **II. The Security Dilemma**

In their 2008 book, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*, Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler defined the security dilemma as a two level strategic predicament' consisting of the 'dilemma of interpretation', and the 'dilemma of response'.<sup>1</sup> Faced with the condition of existential uncertainty in an anarchic world, the dilemma of interpretation

is the predicament facing decision-makers when they are confronted ... with a choice between two significant and usually (but not always) undesirable

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<sup>1</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp.4-5.

alternatives about the military policies and political postures of other entities ... [policymakers] have to decide whether perceived military developments are for defensive or self-protective purposes only ... or whether they are for offensive purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The dilemma of response follows from the dilemma of interpretation, and defines the difficult choice faced by states in formulating policy responses to a given interpretation of another state's intent.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Booth and Wheeler coined the term 'strategic challenge'<sup>4</sup> to refer to a situation where policymakers interpret the intentions of another state as aggressive. They described the predicament faced by policymaker; 'should they signal, by words and deeds, that they will react in kind, for deterrent purposes? Or should they seek to signal reassurance?' Both courses of action carry an element of risk; if policymakers in State A adopt a confrontational response to what it believes to be a strategic challenge from State B and build up their material capabilities, its actions create a dilemma of interpretation for State B, which has to determine if State A's arming is driven by offensive or defensive intent. If State B also resolves its dilemma of interpretation in a confrontational manner and responds by arming, State A believes that its security fears are vindicated and acquires more weapons. Repeated cycles of this confrontational resolution of the dilemma of response lead to what Booth and Wheeler refer to as a 'security paradox'<sup>5</sup>; although States A and B are both arming to defend themselves, their actions, by contributing to the other's security fears, lead to an arms race and escalating hostility, resulting in reduced security for both sides.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, if State A attempts to reassure State B through not arming itself, it will face unilateral strategic vulnerability if State B turns out to be an existential strategic challenge.

They described the predicament faced by policymaker; 'should they signal, by words and deeds, that they will react in kind, for deterrent purposes? Or should they seek to signal reassurance?' Both courses of action carry an element of risk; if policymakers in State A adopt a confrontational response to what it believes to be a

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<sup>2</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p.4. It should be noted that this is a departure from the mainstream definition of the security dilemma; see below, n.4

<sup>3</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp.4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p.9.

<sup>5</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p.9.

strategic challenge from State B, State A's actions create a dilemma of interpretation for State B, which has to determine if State A's arming is driven by offensive or defensive intent. If State B also resolves its dilemma of interpretation in a confrontational manner and responds by arming, State A believes that its security fears are vindicated and acquires more weapons.

### **III. Analogies and the Security Dilemma**

This brief background on the definition of the security dilemma in turn leads to a further question, namely, what factors may influence the policymakers' efforts to address their respective dilemmas of interpretation and response? It is interesting to note that, in their definition of the security dilemma, Booth and Wheeler reject the mainstream definition of this phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Rather, they underline the role of human agency in how statesmen formulate security and diplomatic policy in world affairs, citing Gorbachev's adoption of New Thinking in bringing about the end of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> This in turn leads to Booth and Wheeler arguing that the notion of zero-sum security competition as the basis for our understanding of the security dilemma is too deterministic in explaining international politics. In so doing, Booth and Wheeler bring our attention to the Constructivist argument that the security dilemma can be seen as a social construct resulting from antagonistic interaction between states that has turned their mutual hostility into a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>9</sup>

The Constructivist critique of the predominantly Realist approach to analysing the security dilemma was outlined in Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics*, in which he argued that defensively intentioned states inadvertently turn into rivals not as a result of their acquisition of armaments, but rather due to their identification (be it accurate or inaccurate) of one another as acquiring such armaments for hostile purposes (ie, conquest).<sup>10</sup> Under such circumstances, the belief that they are faced with an aggressor that has to be defended

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<sup>7</sup> The mainstream definition of the security dilemma underlines how the efforts by one state to increase its security have the effect of undermining the security of its rival. This definition of the security dilemma thus suggests that the phenomenon is a process of zero-sum security competition between rival states, between whom there is no basis for compatibility in their respective security interests. See Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p.8.

<sup>8</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p.254.

<sup>9</sup> Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp.93-96.

<sup>10</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p.269.

against leads to both sides acquiring more weapons to defend themselves. In so doing, however, this process of arms acquisition causes both sides to believe that their fears of one another as potential threats are vindicated. This emergence of a Hobbesian logic of anarchy is reflected by an identification of one another as hostile aggressors to be defended against, thus leading to a vicious circle of escalating tensions and arms racing.

Yet, Critical Constructivists have criticised Wendt for placing undue emphasis on the actions of states as the primary basis for analysing how relations between states are constituted. As Karin Fierke argued in *Changing Games, Changing Strategies*, such a perspective contradicts the constructivist principle that ‘meanings in terms of which action is organised arise out of interaction’.<sup>11</sup> Rather, Fierke argued that, in analysing the constitution of identity, it was necessary to underline the role that language may play in giving meaning to the interaction between states, and how this contributes to the identities that states assign to one another.<sup>12</sup>

Seen in this light, Fierke directed our attention to the importance of viewing language as a form of action which gives meaning to agents.<sup>13</sup> Within the context of international politics, language-acts are important in giving meaning when there are conflicting meanings to the interactions between states.<sup>14</sup> Repeated language acts thus contribute to the identities of states.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, given the constructivist principle that ideas and interests are mutually constitutive, the intersubjective identities that emerge from these language-acts is reflected in how states come to see their interests vis-à-vis one another.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for instance, a state that views another state as a potential security threat defines its own national interests in terms of arming itself to defend against the perceived threat.

The differing Constructivist approaches to analysing the security dilemma in turn underlines the importance of two factors that must be taken into account in

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<sup>11</sup> Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of It’, p.403.

<sup>12</sup> Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies*, pp.17-18.

<sup>13</sup> Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies*, pp.17-18; see also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958)

<sup>14</sup> Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies*, pp.12, 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies*, pp.18-20.

<sup>16</sup> Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies*, pp.32-34.

examining how policymakers' attempts to address their dilemmas of interpretation and response may have the effect of further exacerbating tensions and causing their mutual hostility to escalate. These are, first, the historical background of the historical interaction between two states, and second, the images invoked by the language acts which parallel the emergence of a Hobbesian intersubjective identity.

In understanding how states identify each other, Fierke argued that it is important to remember the ideational context within which their interaction takes place. This accordingly requires an awareness of the culture-specific circumstances of such interaction,<sup>17</sup> in particular past historical episodes which have been instrumental in the shaping of state's identification of their own interests. In this regard, we may also draw on Alistair Iain Johnston's work that examines how China's past history, particularly its being bullied by the Western powers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has come to shape Chinese strategic culture in the modern age.<sup>18</sup> Seen in this light, it may be argued that particular defining moments in history may be seen as turning points in how states conceptualise their identification of their security interests. Thus, for instance, the US entry into World War Two decisively marked America's rise as a global power as well as the end its past isolationism from world affairs.

Furthermore, the significance of defining moments in world history in how states conceptualise their interests overlaps with the other important factor that underpins the escalation of security dilemma. In their analysis of how language-acts constitute meaning in international relations, Critical Constructivists emphasise the importance of the images that are invoked by these language acts insofar as their reference to past history is concerned. Not only are language-acts such as government statements a form of illocution – ie, acts performed by speaking;<sup>19</sup> as noted by Kennan Ferguson, language-acts may also be seen as an invocation of past history by policymakers to justify the use of military force.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Fierke, 'Multiple Identities, Interfacing Games: The Social Construction of Western Action in Bosnia', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2/4 (1996), p.469

<sup>18</sup> Alistair Iain Johnston, 'Beijing's Security Behaviour in the Asia-Pacific: Is China a Dissatisfied power?', in Suh, Katzenstein and Carlson (ed.), *Rethinking Security in Asia*, pp.35-36, 68-75.

<sup>19</sup> Harry Gould, 'Constructivist International Relations Theory and the Semantics of Performative Language', in François Debrix (ed.), *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World*, p.57.

<sup>20</sup> Kennan Ferguson, 'Three Ways of Spilling Blood', in Debrix (ed.), *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World* pp.88-95.

The convergence of these two factors may thus be seen as analogies through which policymakers respond to the security dilemma. The invocation of defining moments in history that have marked a state's newly adopted identification of its security interests within the context of responding to the outbreak of a perceived security threat are particularly noteworthy. Language acts that place an outbreak of conflict within the context of defining moments in military history simultaneously a state's identification of its security interests and how those security interests have been shaped by such recent history. Thus to illustrate, let us imagine Country A which has come to redefine its security interests in the aftermath of Conflict B. In the aftermath of Conflict B is the outbreak of Conflict C'. When the leader of Country A chooses to justify his military intervention response to Conflict C through language-acts that recall the legacy of Conflict B, it may be argued that the response to the newer conflict is, in effect, drawing on the analogy of Country A's identification of its security interests which have resulted from its involvement in Conflict B.

#### **IV. Truman Confronts North Korea, 1950**

It may be argued that such analogies have come to shape the social construction of the US-North Korean security dilemma since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. This may be briefly reflected in the fundamental shift in US strategic thinking as a result of the US involvement in World War Two. Prior to 1941, the predominant sentiment of isolationism in the United States had led to Washington's policy of neutrality in response to Nazi Germany's occupation of Czechoslovakia and subsequent domination of continental Europe as well as Japan's invasion of China. To some extent, this was the result of the assumption that the United States, buffeted from the European powers and Japan by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was a strategically self-sufficient island that was immune to external developments and thus had no need for foreign entanglements.

Yet, the events of 1941-1945 had a fundamental impact on US strategic thinking. In spite of having no territories close to the United States, the Japanese use of aircraft carriers had made it possible to inflict extremely severe losses on the US military in the Hawaiian Islands. Armed neutrality and large oceans were no longer enough to safeguard the US from attack by foreign powers. Furthermore, the global nature of World War Two had carved out three areas of primary strategic importance

in the Eurasian heartland, namely, Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, all of which were decisive in determining the outcome of that conflict due to their high concentration of population, raw materials, and industrial heartland, leading to Washington's acknowledgement of geo-strategically vital locations beyond US shores. Under such circumstances, a return to the isolationism of the pre-1941 era was no longer possible.

Further underlining the global nature of US security interests in the post-1945 world was the emergence of the Soviet Union as a rival superpower that had contiguous borders with all three vital geostrategic regions. Although the US was the sole possessor of the nuclear bomb in 1945, it had been the Soviet Union that had borne the brunt of the land war effort against Nazi Germany, and which, in terms of conventional military power, had arguably emerged from World War Two as equal to the US. This was of all the more concern for the Truman Administration, given the growing suspicion between Washington and Moscow over Stalin's occupation of Eastern Europe and the imposition of Soviet-backed regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia. These trends, coming alongside the US's existing antipathy towards Stalin's communist ideology, led to growing US fears after 1945 that the Soviet Union would be the next great security challenge to the US.

This was reflected in Truman's inaugural address in January 1949, during which he referred to communism as a 'false philosophy ... a threat to the efforts of free nations to bring about world recovery and lasting peace', against which Truman pledged to 'strengthen freedom-loving nations against the dangers of aggression.'<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in outlining his administration's promotion of collective security under the Treaty of Rio de Janeiro, Truman underlined that that 'if we can make it sufficiently clear, in advance, that any armed attack affecting our national security would be met with overwhelming force, the armed attack might never occur.'<sup>22</sup>

The language-acts embodied in Truman's speech are particularly telling in defining his identification of US interests in the aftermath of World War Two. It is

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<sup>21</sup> President Harry S. Truman, 'Inaugural Address, 20 January 1949', accessed via the American Presidency Project, 5 October 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13282>.

<sup>22</sup> Truman, 'Inaugural Address, 20 January 1949'.

notable that Truman referred to the ideology of ‘communism’ as a threat not only to the United States, but to ‘freedom-loving nations’, suggesting a Manichean perspective that divided the world into ‘good’ (‘free countries’ led by the US) versus ‘evil’ (the Soviet-led communist bloc). Even more important was Truman’s declaration that the US had to clearly communicate, ‘in advance’ of ‘any armed attack’, its willingness to use ‘overwhelming force’ in defense of national security, in so doing underlining the credibility of the US deterrence posture. The importance of communicating a clear threat of force is clearly an invocation of the legacy of the Sudetenland Crisis of 1938, during which the inability of Britain and France to communicate resolve in defense of Czechoslovakia had whetted the Nazi appetite for conquest and thus encouraged further Nazi territorial expansion the following year. Such language acts, by condemning the legacy of pre-war appeasement of aggressors whilst simultaneously referring to ‘communism’ as a threat to ‘freedom-loving countries’ in the world, suggest that Truman had come to identify the Soviet Union as harbouring a plan for world domination not unlike the visions of world conquest attributed to Hitler. In other words, the Truman Administration had, by 1950, come to the assumption that the Soviet Union was the leader of a monolithic communist bloc intent on spreading communist expansion throughout the world. In light of the analogy to Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler during the Sudetenland Crisis, the logical course of action for Washington was that the US had to be willing to undertake the use of armed force in defense of non-communist countries to avoid encouraging the Soviet Union into further adventures.

The continuity of the analogy to the run-up to World War Two was further reflected in Truman’s response to the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. As noted by Glenn Paige, for Truman, ‘the North Korean attack was the same in nature as the German, Italian and Japanese aggressions that had led to World War II ... a strong state was attempting to overpower a weaker one’.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, during Truman’s first Blair House conference on 25 June, following news of North Korean invasion, there was concern that the Korean conflict would be accompanied by other military expansion on the other peripheries of the Soviet bloc.<sup>24</sup> Also on 25 June, the Office of Intelligence Research claimed that ‘the North Korean Government is

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<sup>23</sup> Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean Decision: June 24-30, 1950* (New York: The Free Press, p.1968), p.115.

<sup>24</sup> Paige, *The Korean Decision*, p.133.

*completely* under Kremlin control ... the move against South Korea must therefore be considered a Soviet move.’<sup>25</sup> (emphasis by Milliken)

In other words, the outbreak of the Korean War was seen as being orchestrated by a monolithic communist bloc masterminded by Stalin in Moscow. Equally significant was Truman’s identification of the threat posed by the North Korean invasion for US interests. As Truman noted in the first of two conferences at the presidential residence at Blair House on the evening of 25 June,

I believed in the *League of Nations*. *It failed*. Lots of people thought *it failed because we weren’t in it to back it up*. Okay, now we started the United Nations. It was our idea, and in this first big test we just couldn’t let them [the South Koreans] down. If a collective system under the United Nations can work, it must be made to work, and now is the time to call their [the communists’] bluff.<sup>26</sup> [emphasis added]

Here again, Truman’s language-acts reflect the analogy of the Sudetenland Crisis and the failure of the League of Nations to confront Nazi expansion, in so doing whetting Hitler’s appetite and thereby leading to the outbreak of the Second World War. In contrast to this was the invocation of the United Nations as a successor to the League and thus, the need to ensure that the mistake of 1930s ‘appeasement’ was avoided.

Equally significant was these speech-acts took place alongside other statements by Truman and his advisors that warned that the international community saw the US response to the outbreak of the Korean War as a test case for evaluating US resolve in leading international resistance to what was seen as a monolithic communist bloc intent on global expansion not unlike that of the Nazis. Truman declared that ‘Korea is the Greece of the Far East ... if we stand up to them like we did in Greece ... they won’t take any next steps. But if we just stand by, they’ll move

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<sup>25</sup> Cited in Miliken, *The Social Construction of the Korean War*, p.49.

<sup>26</sup> Truman, cited in Miliken, *The Social Construction of the Korean War*, p.54.

into Iran and they'll take over the whole Middle East.'<sup>27</sup>In a similar vein, the State Department's Estimates Group warned that a failure to respond to the North Korean invasion would be seen by the Kremlin as a successful indirect war aimed at increasing Soviet influence, and would 'be considered important [by Moscow] in connection with possible Chinese moves in support of Ho Chi Minh, Burmese Communists, or Malayan Communists; possibly, a satellite attack on Yugoslavia; and possible Soviet moves in Germany or Iran.'<sup>28</sup> Here again, we see speech-acts that cast the North Korean invasion as a precursor move that tested the resolve of the US, not only in Northeast Asia, but also in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe. In other words, the tensions resulting from past episodes such as the imposition of Soviet-backed regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the Berlin Blockade, the Greek Civil War, Soviet threats against Iran and Turkey, were now lumped together with North Korea's invasion of the South as well as Marxist guerrilla movements in Southeast Asia as part of a wider movement to bring about communist domination of the world.<sup>29</sup>

These assumptions were further reflected during the second Blair House conference that Truman held with his advisors on the evening of 26 June 1950. In his memoirs, Truman recalled how 'what was developing in Korea seemed to [Truman] like a repetition on a larger scale of what had happened in Berlin.'<sup>30</sup> See in this light, it may be argued that, in light of the wider background of US-Soviet Cold War antagonism and the Truman Administration's belief that the invasion of South Korea had been undertaken on behalf of a monolithic communist bloc led by Moscow, it appears that, by 26 June, Truman and his advisors had resolved their dilemma of interpretation in the belief that the invasion of South Korea marked a strategic challenge to US strategic and security interests. Yet, even at this stage, Washington still faced a dilemma of response. Although there was pressure to avoid a return to the appeasement of the 1930s, significant debate remained over the appropriate course of action to be adopted by the Truman Administration remained strong. In light of the

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Donovan, *Tumultuous years: the presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1949-1953* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1982) pp.205-06.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Miliken, *The Social Construction of the Korean War*, p.54.

<sup>29</sup> Miliken, *The Social Construction of the Korean War*, pp.54-55.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Paige, *The Korea Decision*, p.170.

route of the South Korean army within the first day of the war, there was support for the notion of direct military intervention to aid the Syngman Rhee's government.

At the same time, however, in light of the Soviet Union's newfound nuclear capability, the proximity of Mao Tse-Tung's China to the Korean peninsula as well as post-1945 war-weariness in the US, there was significant reluctance to risk World War Three, particularly given intelligence reports which claimed that Soviet forces were directly involved in the ground assault on South Korea.<sup>31</sup> Although Truman's advisors agreed that Soviet military action in Europe and the Middle East was not imminent, there was concern that US military intervention in Korea would spark off Soviet counter-intervention, and that such a tit-for-tat sequence of actions could cause the conflict to escalate into a wider war. Under these circumstances, there were concerns that direct US military intervention would run the risk of causing the conflict to escalate into World War III, involving military clashes in Europe as well as Asia.<sup>32</sup> Thus, for the first two days of the Korean War, US military forces in Northeast Asia were restricted to assisting in the evacuation of US citizens from the Korean peninsula.

Yet, set against these concerns, the dominant analogy of how the 1930s appeasement of Nazi Germany had failed to prevent the eventual outbreak of World War Two proved to be the main factor that led the Truman Administration to opt for direct US military intervention in the Korean War. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General of the Army Omar Bradley later reflected that 'here was another act of aggression that, if we appeased in this case, something else would come along, and either you appeased again or took action in the next one ... one appeasement leads to another until you eventually make war inevitable.' Furthermore, Bradley accepted the possibility of war with the Soviet Union as an acceptable risk, as 'the choice was not ours, for the Communists had thrown down the gauntlet.' General Bradley's superior, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnston, similarly referred to the possibility of war with the Soviet Union as a 'calculated risk', whilst Ambassador-at-Large Jessup opined that 'the invasion had to be met even if it meant the beginning of World War III.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Paige, *The Korea Decision*, pp.172-73.

<sup>32</sup> Paige, *The Korea Decision*, pp.170-71.

<sup>33</sup> Bradley, Johnson and Jessup, cited in Paige, *The Korea Decision*, pp.173-74

Here again, the analogy to the 1930s is clear. Prior to the Sudetenland Crisis of 1938, the League of Nations, Britain and France had failed to show resolve in response to Germany's re-militarisation of the Rhineland, Hitler's reintroduction of conscription, German involvement in the Spanish Civil War and the Anschluss with Austria. The language-acts of Bradley's testimony, placed within the context of US tensions towards the Soviet Union during the late 1940s, suggests that the US Department of Defense, saw the invasion of South Korea as part of a gradual process through which Moscow would seek to expand communist influence. Furthermore, the possibility that the Soviet Union would seek all-out conflict with the US was acknowledged as a strategic contingency that had be hedged against. Equally telling were the speech-acts of Secretary Johnston and Ambassador Jessup. The very possibility of all-out war with the Soviet union was accepted as something that had be risked, as the failure to do so over the invasion of Korea would, in the minds of the Truman Administration, whet Soviet appetite for further expansion. Here again, the image of the 1930s is recalled, as the failure to confront Germany prior to 1939 caused the Nazis to undertake more and more aggressive actions, culminating in the Second World War. All-out conflict with the Soviet Union was thus a strategic scenario that the Truman Administration had to hedge against, particularly given the perception in Washington that Stalin sought to dominate the world order in much the same way that the Nazis had.

For other members of the Truman Administration, the analogy of the 1930s held other significant implications in resolving their dilemma of response over the invasion of South Korea. As Secretary of State, Dean Acheson had been instrumental in the formulation of the Truman Doctrine and in promoting the notion of collective security as a means of committing the US to the defence of Western Europe against the prospect of Soviet expansion. Although the Korean peninsula had previously not been a factor in the Acheson's identification of regions of vital geo-strategic interest to Washington, he nonetheless saw the North Korean invasion as a threat to the cohesion of the newly-formed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Acheson believed that, if the US failed to come to the defence of a small state resisting communist expansion, the very credibility of the US security commitment to Western Europe would also come under question. As Acheson later reflected, the invasion of South Korea was

a test which would decide whether our collective security system would survive or would crumble ... *If we stood with our arms folded* while Korea was swallowed up, it would have meant abandoning our principles, and it would have the *defeat of the collective security system on which our own safety ultimately depends*.<sup>34</sup> (emphasis added)

Acheson's speech-acts once again invoke the legacy of the 1930s, drawing attention to how the US had remained aloof from the looming crises that had predated the outbreak of World War Two as well as how US neutrality during the 1930s had not stopped Japan from attacking Pearl Harbor. The obvious implication for US security was thus one that called for US intervention to assist in the defence of South Korea in order to deter the supposed monolithic communist bloc from expanding Soviet influence. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that the Truman Administration resolved its dilemma of response in June 1950 based on the assumption that Washington had to signal the credibility of its willingness to resist the invasion of South Korea to avoid giving Moscow and thus avoid the supposed 1930s mistake of appeasement.<sup>35</sup>

These assumptions were further reflected during Truman's press release on 27 June, when the President announced that

In Korea the *Government forces*, which were *armed to prevent border raids and to preserve internal security*, were attacked by invading forces from North Korea ... The *attack upon Korea* makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond *the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will use armed invasion and war*. It has defied *the orders of the Security Council of the United Nations issued to preserve international peace and security* ... I know that all members of the United Nations will consider carefully the consequences of this latest aggression in Korea in defiance of the Charter of the United Nations. A return to the rule of force in international

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<sup>34</sup> Dean Acheson, cited in Paige, *The Korea Decision*, pp.175-76.

<sup>35</sup> Paige, *The Korea Decision*, p.178.

affairs would have far reaching effects. *The United States will continue to uphold the rule of law.*<sup>36</sup> (emphasis added)

The language-acts reflected in the italicized sections of Truman's speech are telling. Truman referred to 'Korea' and the 'Government forces', rather than 'South Korea', thereby implying that the government in Seoul was the legitimate government of the Korean peninsula. The activities of the forces of this 'Korea' are described as 'border and internal security', thereby further casting the government in Seoul as the rightful political authority on the Korean Peninsula. In contrast, Truman referred to 'invading forces from North Korea'; equally interesting is that Truman portrayed North Korea as acting on the bidding of 'Communism'; as noted in *New York Times* coverage of Truman's press release, however, it was clear that North Korea's invasion of the South was seen by policymakers and media in the US as an act of war on behalf of the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> Equally significant, Truman's speech linked the 'invading forces' to 'the use of subversion to conquer independent nations',<sup>38</sup> presumably a reference to the Soviet imposition of Communist regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia, attempts to blackmail the Allies in ceding control of West Berlin, and alleged Soviet sponsorship of Greek Communists in the Greek Civil War. In other words, the language-acts in Truman's speech cast the North Korean attack as part of a concerted effort at territorial expansion by what was perceived in Washington to be a monolithic communist bloc. More significantly, as the outbreak of World War in Europe had been preceded by similar indirect actions by Nazi Germany, as reflected in the Sudetenland Crisis and Nazi involvement in the Spanish Civil War, it may be argued that the Truman Administration saw the outbreak of the Korean War as a limited war initiated by the Soviet Union to aggressively expand against US global interests.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> President Harry S. Truman, 'Ordering US Air and Naval Forces to Assist the Republic of Korea', June 27, 1950, in *The United States and the Korea Problem: Documents 1943-1953* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), pp.36-37.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Leviero, 'Truman Orders U.S. Air, Navy Units To Fight In Aid Of Korea; U.N. Council Supports Him; Our Fliers In Action; Fleet Guards Formosa', *New York Times*, 27 June 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Truman, cited in 'The United States and the Korea Problem', pp.36-37.

<sup>39</sup> Paige, *The Korean Decision*, p.115.

Equally important are the language-acts through which Truman justified US intervention in the Korean War. In his speech, Truman invoked the ‘rule of law’,<sup>40</sup> thereby framing Washington’s entry into the Korean war against the government in Pyongyang as a struggle of ‘good (the US) versus bad (Communism, North Korea)’. Furthermore, in citing the United Nations’ role in ‘preserv[ing] international peace and security’, the legacy of the League of Nations’ failure to confront Hitler during the 1930s (thereby failing to maintain peace and security) comes to mind. More importantly, language-acts of ‘law-and-order’, in invoking the image of law enforcement against criminal activity, cast North Korea as a ‘villain’ that had initiated the ‘criminal action’ of launching an unprovoked invasion of South Korea. Under such circumstances, and in light of the US as a superpower, Truman’s commitment of the US military to the Korean War was effectively justified as a police action to defend South Korea against Pyongyang’s ‘criminal’ ambition of conquest and thus contribute to regional stability against ‘aggressive communist expansion’.<sup>41</sup> In invoking the ‘orders of the United Nations’ to justify US intervention in the Korean War, Truman’s language-acts recalled US isolationism during the 1930s and that the US did not take part in the conflict until the attack on Pearl Harbor. In this sense, Truman effectively referred to isolationism as an irresponsible position that had contributed to Hitler’s belief that Nazi expansion would not be opposed.

## **V. Conclusion**

Seen in this light, it may be argued that analogies, in invoking past legacies (in the case of this case study, references to how the failure to confront Nazi Germany had whetted Hitler’s appetite for conquest and thus arguably contributed to the outbreak of the Second World war) are important factors insofar as policymakers’ efforts to address their dilemmas of interpretation and response are concerned. Furthermore, the importance of these analogies is further underlined by empirical evidence that challenges the interpretations implied in the invocation of these analogies. Gavan McCormack, for instance, has rejected the notion that the outbreak of the Korean War was instigated by a monolithic communist bloc, but was instead ‘a civil war between two rival Korean regimes that stemmed from the external division

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<sup>40</sup> Truman, cited in ‘*The United States and the Korea Problem*’, p.37.

<sup>41</sup> Paul G. Pierpaoli, *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia and London (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp.29-30.

of the peninsula imposed in 1945<sup>42</sup>. Similarly, Jeong-Koo Kang notes that the emerging rivalry between various nationalist groups vying for power in Seoul can be seen in a poll held by the Korean Newspaper Reporter Association in 1947 that revealed that 71% favoured a socialist-oriented People's Committee as the administration of a unified Korea.<sup>43</sup> Kang thus argues that the Korean War broke out not on 25 June 1950, but rather in early 1950, when the South Korean Worker's Party officially declared an armed struggle against US occupation and the Rhee government in order to prevent the country from being split into two.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, despite casting the US involvement in the Korean War as a 'law-and-order' action to defend South Korea's 'freedom', Truman did not acknowledge the Syngman Rhee Administration's execution and torture of political prisoners even before the North invaded in June 1950, or the presence of large numbers of wartime Japanese collaborators in Rhee's government.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Bruce Cumings has also alleged that the US Army colluded with the South Koreans in the execution of suspected communist sympathizers.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, however, it should also be noted that analogies can also work in a converse direction, ie, in invoking the prospect of inadvertent war resulting from miscalculation and mutual fear. Although this dimension of analogies is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that, prior to running for Vice-President, Senator Joe Biden recalled

how when the Russian army mobilized ... it *never intended that it was going to end up in a war*, and ... Germany responded, and *how we got very rapidly to a point of no return* very quickly that maybe history could have avoided, depending on the *misreading of one another* and our intentions.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> McCormack, *Target North Korea*, pp.8-10.

<sup>43</sup> Jeong-Koo Kang, 'A Critical Evaluation of the US Role in the Division of Korea and the Korean War', *Korean Social Science Journal*, 32/1 (2000), pp.82-84.

<sup>44</sup> Kang, 'A Critical Evaluation of the US Role in the Division of Korea', pp.96-97.

<sup>45</sup> Halliday and Cumings, *Korea: The Unknown War*, pp.45, 72; Cumings, "Decoupled from History: North Korea in the 'Axis of Evil'", in Cumings, Ervand Abrahamian and Moshe Ma'oz, *Inventing the Axis of Evil: The Truth of North Korea, Iran and Syria* (New York and London: New Press, 2004), pp.18, 20-22.

<sup>46</sup> Halliday and Cumings, *Korea: the Unknown War*, pp.91-92.

<sup>47</sup> Senator Joe Biden, 'WMD Developments on the Korean Peninsula', *Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, United States Senate, 4 February, 2003, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2003), pp.64-65.

A different analogy is invoked here. Biden's speech-acts refer to a different crisis, namely, the July Crisis of 1914, and how Russian and German attempts to signal deterrence had the inadvertent impact of further contributing to mutual security fears and thereby causing the crisis to escalate into the First World War. Seen in this light, it may thus be argued that there are grounds for exploring how 'Guns of August' scenarios can form analogies through which policymakers can attempt to exercise security dilemma sensibility.<sup>48</sup> Yet, this in turn leads to a further question – namely, even when policymakers are aware that a crisis may be the result of mutual security fears and misunderstanding rather than outright hostility, they still face difficulties in adopting policies in exercising such security dilemma sensibility. Although Biden and President Obama had, prior to their electoral victory in 2008, voiced their willingness to address North Korea's supposed security fears of the US with a promise of dialogue with Pyongyang without preconditions, it is notable that such dialogue has not occurred. If anything, it should be noted that, since entering office in early 2009, the Obama Administration has adopted a posture broadly similar to that of the Bush Administration from 2001 to 2006 (in demanding dismantlement of the DPRK's nuclear facilities as a precondition for dialogue with North Korea).

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<sup>48</sup> John R. Broder, 'As Running Mate, Biden Offers Foreign Policy Heft but an Insider Image', *New York Times*, 17 August 2008.