

Australia, the Korean Question and the United Nations 1946–1991

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This paper represents an initial attempt to track and analyse one previously unrecognised feature of the political history of the relationship between Korea and Australia, and that is the role played by Australia as a member of the United Nations Organization in respect to the so-called Korea question. Drawing on source documents from both the UN and the Australian Archives, this paper examines the changing positions of Australia as the Korea question developed in the UN General Assembly, from the beginnings of the UN Organization until the time when both Koreas were admitted in 1991. The paper identifies these various positions as responses to changing domestic and international politics and their impacts on Australian foreign policy as enacted around the Korea question in the UN.

Introduction

This paper represents an initial attempt to track and analyse one previously unrecognised feature of the political history of the relationship between Korea and Australia, and that is the role played by Australia as a member of the United Nations Organization in respect to the so-called Korea Question¹ in the UN. In his recent edited collection of resolutions pertaining to Korea adopted by the principal organs of the United Nations, In Seop Chung (2002, p.v) noted that the term Korea Question may refer to all issues that have any relation with Korea at the UN, ‘even though until 1976 the title ‘Korea question’ had been used to refer to the actual agenda of the General Assembly’ (2002,v). Unpacking this notion more specifically, at the 112th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, 14 November 1947, the ‘Korea Question’ was defined as the question concerned with the ‘freedom and independence’ of Korea. All debates, resolutions, and actions taken by the UN in respect to Korea over the subsequent 44 years hinged around this central issue of the freedom and independence of Korea.

Nevertheless, the deliberations at the UN over the Korea Question were characterised by a second element—that the Korea Question ‘is primarily a matter for the Korean people’ and that ‘this question cannot be correctly and fairly resolved without the participation of representatives of the indigenous population’ (Chung, 2002, p.1). However, the participation required of Korea in dealing with the issue of its freedom and independence was not possible due to the fact that no government from Korea was a member of the United Nations until 1991. Thus, for over four decades the Korea Question, being the first major international crisis to come before the UN after its inauguration, was conducted in a vacuum, in which the participation of the subject of the question—the Korean people—was not possible.

Given the absence of the Korean voice in UN deliberations regarding the Korea Question, the voices and roles of other UN members in respect to this question take on a particular significance, for it was other nations and not Korea itself, which

¹ For the purposes of clarity in this paper the term Korea Question will be regarded as a formal term, thus capitalized throughout.

determined the way in which the Korea Question unfolded and was addressed in the UN. The Korea Question had a special resonance, moreover, for it was, ultimately about more than just Korea itself, but was a question—perhaps *the* question—around which international politics revolved in the re-making of the world community of nations in the period after World War II; it was, in essence, a central question in the international construction of the Cold War. A review of the debates, documents, resolutions and actions within the UN regarding the Korea Question reveals the expressions, positioning, and political manoeuvres of the various nation-actor members of the United Nations.

This paper is concerned with the role played by the nation of Australia in the UN in respect to the Korea Question. The emergence of the Korea Question caught Australia at a particularly important time of its own political unfolding after World War II. Whereas prior to the war the political, economic and cultural orientations of Australia had been strongly towards the colonial home of England, the war and its aftermath had begun a shift in those spheres towards other arenas, particularly the United States of America, and economically towards Asia. Australia had strong bi-lateral trade agreements in place with Japan from the 1930s, selling mineral resources to Japan, so much so that the Prime Minister Robert (Bob) Menzies was lampooned as ‘Pig-Iron’ Bob during the war, because the iron ore that Australia sold to Japan was returning as ‘pig iron’ in bombs dropped on Northern Australia.

The role that Australia was to adopt in respect to the Korea Question in the UN challenged and brought forth the international identity and regional orientation that Australia was seeking to establish at that time. An analysis of Australia’s participation in the Korea Question thus provides insights into the Australian political process at an important time of its development, particularly in respect to its international context. The sometimes subtle changes of participation by Australia in the period under review from the late 1940s until the admission of both Koreas to UN membership in 1991 reflect an interesting insight into Australian foreign policy and the role of the UN in the dialectics of international state relations.

Moreover, given the close economic, cultural and political ties between Australia and South Korea today, and the regional role to which Australia aspires as a ‘middle power’ and broker in regional disputes and crises, including an aspiration for some diplomatic function in the regular crises involving North Korea, an examination of its track record in this area is of some meaning.

Certainly, aspects of the Korean Question also influenced the political situation and also the conduct of government in Australia. For instance, some of the data on which this paper is based comes from the Cabinet Records, which are the records of discussion and decisions of the inner sanctum of powerful government ministers in Australia. It was noted (Knott, 2006/URL) that the practice of the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr Allen Stanley Brown, to take notes of discussions in Cabinet meetings only began during the Korean War. Knott commented that the outbreak of the war ‘is likely to have been the catalyst’ for the recording of such notes, following the practice used in meetings of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council in WWII’. The practice of maintaining Cabinet records has continued to the present, and represents one of the most important archival documentary sources on the inner workings of the Australian political system.

This paper will now proceed to review Australia’s context in the United Nations system and its role in the Korea Question.

Australia, Japan and Korea before World War II

Prior to 1901 Australia was a colony of England indirectly under English rule with a system of self-governance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, exactly at that period when Korea was collapsing under Japan's expansion, Australia became an independent nation with its own constitution, military forces and national system. Its economy was heavily dependent on England as a destination of exports of the mainstay products of wool and wheat. Even more so, its political culture and sense of identity were pure-bred English and proudly so. Australia was a highly class-structured society with English descendents in the elite groups and the third-generation descendents of the predominantly Irish convict ancestors as the working classes. Two features of Australian political leadership at the time of Federation are particularly relevant to this discussion. The first of these was the indubitable belief in the British Empire and Australia's role and identity as a figurative 'child' of the Old Country. Even as late as 1942, in his wartime speech to American people, Labour Party Prime Minister John Curtin declared: 'We Australians, with New Zealand, represent Great Britain here in the Pacific – we are her sons – and on us the responsibility falls' (Curtin, in Evatt, 1945, p.44). The other relevant feature was the active hostility towards 'Asiatics' particularly of the Chinese variety, who were coming to Australia in increasing numbers through the gold rushes after 1850 and after the USA passed an exclusion act in 1892. As the numbers of young Chinese immigrant workers swelled in this period, the so-called Father of Federation, and venerated nationalist, Sir Henry Parkes, while Premier of New South Wales in 1884, proposed legislation that would tax Chinese immigrants one hundred pounds each (a vast sum for the times) and limit intake of Chinese to Australia to one person for each three hundred tons of shipping [enforced at 500 tons in 1888] (Roberts, 1935). Parkes announced that 'nor for her Majesty's ships of war, nor for Her Majesty's representatives nor for the Secretary of State do we intend to turn aside from our purpose, which is to terminate the landing of Chinese on these shores forever' (quoted in Roberts, 1935, p.11).

In a climate of hostility and non-contact physical appearance and skin colour were the recognised features of 'Them' and without a doubt, were Australians aware of a separate culture of Koreans, they would be treated as Chinese. Indeed the notion of the 'yellow peril' extended to anyone 'oriental'. With federation in 1901 came the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act (No 17 of 1901) which set up mechanisms for arbitrary exclusion of those seeking entry, implementing the White Australia policy. Interestingly the act was amended in 1905 to allow the entry of Japanese and Indian merchants, students and visitors and, in 1912, Chinese merchants. Economic pragmatism slipped through public antipathy.

Apart from one brief romance to transplant a section of Japanese feudal society to the Northern Territory in 1877 (Clunies-Ross, 1935) the formative period of the Australia– Japan relationship can be framed within, firstly, the growing economic relationship as Japan developed industrially and sought Australian resources; and, secondly, a political relationship shaped by Australia's subservient worship of Britain and related, transferred sense of awe at the might of Imperial Japan. Japan played its diplomatic cards extremely well to the West as it became a full member of the imperial club (some 87% of the known world territories were under colonial rule from nations in Europe or USA just prior to WWI). Japan's expanding territory, modernity and industrial success stood out in Asia and contrasted with China's fragmentation and backwardness. From this perspective, the abiding respect for empire, Australia

fully recognised the boundaries of Japanese territory, including –especially– its territories to the west on the Asian mainland – i.e. Korea.

At the same time the White Australia policy was a major cause of discord between the two nations. It was not that Japan society was interested in emigration and they had restricted the number of people moving to the US via Hawaii. Rather the Japanese government was outraged that they could be included in the groups of undesirables to be permitted into Australia. They objected that, according to historian Roberts writing soon afterwards, ‘the ultimate policy that was adopted made no discrimination between Japanese and the “kanakas, negroes, Pacific Islanders, Indians and other eastern peoples” with whom they objected to be placed’ (Roberts, 1935, p.23). The upshot was a cultural turning away, indifference and mutual ignorance between Japanese and Australian societies. Australians were truly disinterested and oblivious to the Japanese repressive colonialism in Korea, and it is pertinent to recall in this context that Australian society and government were themselves colonizers over Indigenous Australians and throughout the country massacres still were perpetrated and Aboriginal people were under the control of the Protectorates, excluded without citizenship rights and considered to be a dying race of people. Colonization. Racist hate. Australians practised these as a matter of natural values. They had no incentives to question the legitimate right of Japan as the ruler of Korea.

The Anglo-Japan treaty that was concluded in 1902 only served to further legitimise Japan in Australian eyes. This treaty, according to Roberts ‘placed the seal on Japan’s modernization; it admitted her to the ranks of the Great Powers; it brought her within the orbit of the western world’ (1935, p.25). This treaty, Article 1, recognised that Japan ‘is interested in a peculiar degree politically as well as commercially and industrially in Korea’ and in the treaty Britain and Japan pledged to support and mutually protect each other’s interests (Roberts, 1935, p.25). Obviously this treaty had a strong impact on Australia. The British treaty with Japan could only confirm the status of Japan. While the Australian government stuck with the White Australia policy, it had no doubt that Japan was an imperial power and had no interest in the issue of Japanese sovereignty on the Asian mainland. Only when, after WWI when Japan occupied the Pacific islands vacated by the defeated Germans, did the Australian government protest against the Japanese expansion, because they were getting too close.

Economic relations grew rapidly with the rising standards of living in Japan, such that by the 1930s Australia supplied over 70% of Japan’s wheat and over 80% of Japan’s wool, representing over 20% of Australian wool exports. Relations were largely restricted to trade and certainly there were no concerns over matters of ethnocide in Korea (Clunies-Ross, 1935).

The shock of Japanese treachery and betrayal in attacking Pearl Harbour only served to confirm the racist hostilities towards the people and societies of Asia. Then after three years of the Pacific War in which many thousands of Australians died at the hands of the Japanese enemy there was only triumph at the victory. There were no sympathies for Japanese people who were the mass victims of the nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nor were there any considerations for the Korean people. The process of restoration of Japan and the trading wealth it represented to Australia were priorities, however. The restoration of the Japanese social and bureaucratic system in Korea was supported without question and the only concerns were ones of governance of Korea, now that the Japanese empire had been dismantled. And this issue of the governmental authority in Korea was to be settled by the new

international community of nations in which Australia was a member – the United Nations.

The Emergence of the Korea Question in the United Nations

Australia had been a member of the League of Nations and in the Inter-Allied Declaration (London declaration) June 12, 1941, Australia was one of the fourteen nations that declared ‘The only true basis of enduring peace is the willing cooperation of free peoples in a world in which, relieved of the menace of aggression, all may enjoy economic security ‘(in Sachs 1990, 7). The 3-power Cairo conference (1943) (involving Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang) announced a commitment to the independence of Korea (Quinones, 2003, p.98). Subsequent meetings at Dumbarton Oaks (21 Aug-28 Sept., 1944) and Yalta (Feb. 8, 1945) proposed an international trusteeship temporarily to rule Korea and laid the grounds for the establishment of a new world body of nations.

Formation of the UN Organization took place at the San Francisco United Nations Conference on International Organization April 25-June 26, 1945, with 50 member states represented, including Australia. The Australian representative was Dr. H.V. Evatt, Minister of External Affairs, who made a significant impact on the conference and the UN Charter by insisting on the rights of small states as against the hegemonic power of the large and powerful nations, particularly USA, United Kingdom and Soviet Union (Hudson, 1993). An application for admission by the provisional Korean government was denied.

Similarly at the Berlin Conference (July 22, 1945) an application from Syngman Rhee asking for diplomatic recognition for the Korean provisional government also was ignored. It was clear that the political fate of Korea was to be determined by the victorious great powers. At the subsequent Potsdam Conference of July 26, 1945, agreement was reached on the boundary of USSR & USA military operations in Korea, north and south of the 41st parallel. The Soviet Union declared war on Japan August 8, two days after Hiroshima, permitting them to move into Japanese territory on the peninsula and four days later they occupied the north, following the strategy set out in the Potsdam agreement. On surrender, August 15, Truman shifted the boundary to the 38th parallel. Japanese troops to the north surrendered to the Russians, those to the south to the Americans when they arrived on Sept 8.

In December, 1945, foreign ministers of UK, USA & USSR agreed to a ‘temporary trusteeship’ of the Korean peninsula. The Bi-lateral Joint Commission between USA and the USSR met in Seoul from March, 1946, until August, 1947, without being able to reach agreement on plans for a unified Korea. In September, 1947, the USA submitted the problem to the United Nations. From the outset the issue was mobilised as a point of contention between USSR and USA. In the General Assembly debate the USSR claimed that the arrangements for Korea had been already determined under previous agreements and it was illegal for the US to present the motion to the UN. However the issue remained with the UN and it was clear that the fate of Korea would be determined by UN processes.

Australia and the Korean Question Prior to the Korean War: the Evatt Doctrine for Small States

At the San Francisco conference Australia's External Affairs minister Herbert V. Evatt made a significant input to the formulation of the Charter of the UN. In particular he led the debate to restrict in the Security Council the veto power of the Big 5, e.g. on the veto to place items on the Security Council agenda. Evatt was seen as leading the small and medium sized nations (Hudson, 1993). Dr Evatt was a leading member of the Labour Party government in Australia, and he took Labour principles of representing the workers and less powerful minority groups into the world forum. He regarded the success of the new organisation in achieving lasting world peace hinged upon its right to pursue economic and social justice as well as military security, as in the opening statement he made on behalf of the Australian Delegation:

In our view the success of the Conference will be measured by one test. Will it bring into existence an organisation which will give to the peoples of the world a reasonable assurance of security from war and reasonable prospect of international action to secure social justice and economic advancement? (quoted in Watt, 1967, p.83).

Evatt adopted a particular role to promote the rights and interests of small nations in the world forum and he carried his role into a range of UN activities. Thus Evatt's served on the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, from which his role in 1945 as Chairman of the Policy Committee of the Far-Eastern Advisory Committee, set up in Washington to deal with questions of post-war policy in relation to Japan, became the initial engagement of Australia with the Korean Question. He was to lead the Australian delegation to the United Nations from 1946–48 and in 1948 he was elected president of the General Assembly of the UN. Thus Evatt was an influential voice in the UN in the period leading up to the elections that brought Syngman Rhee to power.

In his approach to the Korea question, Evatt certainly expressed his support for the recognition of the rights of small states. Not surprisingly, then, the initial period of the Korean question can be identified as a period of active Australian engagement and support for the process to introduce Korea as an independent democratic state. The Korean issue was a focal point for the Australian international advocacy on the rights of small states as the basis of international security (Watt, 1967).

This was the first time that Australia engaged with the issues of the Korean Question in any formal way and they were prompt in becoming actively involved. In the absence of Korean participation, the UN established the UN Temporary Commission on Korea with 10-nation membership, including Australia. The role of the Commission was to organise the process of the establishment of the Korean nation-state, integrating those parts of the country under Soviet control with those under US control south of the 38 parallel. This Commission had a very short brief and much to do, specifically the organising and supervision of a general election on the basis of adult suffrage within six months. The Commission's responsibilities included that, after the formation of the new Korean government, the Commission would 'facilitate and expedite' such matters as the formation of national security forces and the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

The plan was for the members of the Temporary Commission to work in Korea supervising the elections. However, the Soviet Union blocked their entry in the occupied areas in North Korea. Subsequently, the elections were held in the South (on May 10, 1948) and the Government of the Republic of Korea was inaugurated on August 15, 1948. Less than one month later the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea was proclaimed in the North, with Kim Il Sung as leader.

While the UN acknowledged that the Temporary Commission had fulfilled its warrant as much as was practicable, the debate in the General Assembly (GA) during Sept.-Dec. 1948 turned to the new problem that had been created – one could say partly by them—in the existence now of a divided nation.

The extent to which Australia had thrust itself into the conflict politics of the Korea question can be gauged by the draft resolution submitted by the USSR to the GA, in which it alleged that the activities of the Temporary Commission resulted in the election taking place in conditions of ‘police constraint and repression’ (quoted in Chung, 2002, 15). Moreover this resolution charged the Temporary Commission with an explicit agenda to divide Korea and suppress democracy ‘contrary to the principles and purposes of the United Nations’ (ibid). The Russian reaction can be interpreted as a response to the very activist role played by the UN Temporary Commission, with Australia being one its most active members.

Chung (2002, 13) noted that a 3-power draft resolution was the trigger towards the formation of a new commission, and the nations that proposed this draft resolution were China (nationalist) the USA and Australia. It appears that Australia had decided to set a political priority on the issue of Korea and was seeking to build its presence and reputation as a constructive force on the side of democracy and the West. Despite the opposition of the USSR and its allies, a new Commission was established—the Commission on Korea—with just seven nations, and once again Australia was prominent. This commission was entrusted with a more complex set of tasks than the previous commission, being to: ‘lend its good offices to bring about the unification of Korea; to seek to ‘remove the barriers to economic, social and other friendly intercourse’ between the two new Koreas; and to observe the withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea [195 (III) of the 187th Plenary, 12 December, 1948; in Chung, 2002, p. 10–12]. From the perspective of the present time we can see that all aspects of this mission were doomed, in that none of them were achieved. The new commission was to be based in Korea and was to travel to Korea to ‘consult and observe’ around the country.

In January, 1949, the application by ROK for UN membership was blocked by veto of USSR at the Security Council. The Security Council submitted a report to the Ad Hoc Political Committee of the GA in which Australia was active in supporting the Korean application.

The UN Commission on Korea duly established its office in Seoul and held its first meeting in February, 1949.

Thus the earliest period of the Korean question in the UN can be recognised as a period when Australia – from a previous history of ignorance about and indifference to Korea – emerged as a nation heavily involved in the Korea question as a consequence of its ambitious thrust onto the world stage through the United Nations and the particular doctrines of small states propounded by its high-profile UN representative.

A Shift from the Support for Small States to Endorsement of Super-powers

In 1949 the Australian political landscape changed considerably when the Labour government in which Evatt was a member was defeated in elections and the newly-formed conservative Liberal party under Robert Menzies came into power. The international support for small states gave way to a policy towards re-alignment with the great powers particularly seeking their umbrella against what was now regarded as the expanding spectre of international communism. Menzies' foreign policy pre-occupation was with protecting Australia's security which he regarded as vulnerable and isolated. In the UN the Australian role changed accordingly. While it remained active in the Korea question, frequently sponsoring resolutions calling for the independence of Korea, it now accepted the fact of division between an anti-communist south and the communist DPRK and was one of the more prominent nations of what was now becoming the Western bloc that voted against draft resolutions in support of North Korean membership in the UN, submitted by the emerging pro-communist bloc.

Thus in the two years from the 1948 elections in Korea, the Cold War was established in the UN around the Korea question, and Australia was an active and leading voice establishing the ideological boundaries. Whereas Evatt's thesis had been one that advocated the equal rights of small powers to great ones, the Menzies doctrine was one of falling in behind the dominant western powers as they led the fight against communism. Rather than asserting an independent foreign policy for Australia, Menzies was more concerned to protect Australia by re-inventing alliances with the Mother Country, Britain, to which Menzies was particularly attached, and also with the new Pacific power of the USA.

Australia at the UN during the Korean War

Australia's reaction to the outbreak of war demonstrated the approach of the national government to international crises.

When the Korean War erupted on June 25, 1950, the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling on North Korea to withdraw, and when that did not happen the US President Truman ordered US military forces to defend the southern part of Korea. The Security Council promptly passed a resolution calling on members to provide military support. The circumstances of Australia's commitment provide an interesting insight into Australian foreign policy at that time.

The recently released 1950 Cabinet Notebooks recorded the discussion among government ministers as they responded to the crisis. They observed that Korea 'represented only one phase of Russian aggression', with another major front closer to home in Malaya, so initially limited the size of Australia commitment to the UN action to two warships and an air force squadron. The Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies decided against ground troop involvement, then left for an overseas trip to Britain and the USA. Even as the situation in Korea deteriorated and the acting PM sent cables to Menzies advising that 'we may lose an opportunity of cementing friendship with the United States which may not easily present itself again', Menzies held firm against troop commitment. He was of the view that England was not committing troops, so Australia should follow that line. However, after he left London for New York aboard the liner Queen Mary, Britain did decide to commit troops and informed the Australian government in Canberra that they were about to make an

announcement to that effect. Without consulting the PM, and one hour before Britain made their statement, Australia's chief ministers rushed to announce that troops were being sent to Korea. Disgruntled at the insubordination, Menzies found out just before his boat arrived in New York, but was swept up in a wave of American approval, invited to the White House and to address both Houses of Congress. Official historian Hancock commented that Menzies 'brazenly told Congress that he expected British and Australian troops to be joining Australians and Americans in fighting the communists in Korea, (Hancock, website). The subsequent Australian involvement on land, sea and air in the Korean War was substantial, with 1584 casualties (339 killed, 1216 wounded and 29 prisoners of war).

As the war developed Australia sought to build on its growing role as a close US ally and international middle power by taking on further UN responsibilities. For instance Chung (2002, p.34) identifies the formation in 1950 of the Collective Measures Committee, comprising fourteen members, including Australia, whose role was to collect information from member states and report on how to organise a UN armed force to carry out UN actions in support of its Charter, in the context of the Korean crisis.

Further, a commission was established urgently through the General Assembly as a result of a proposal by eight members, including Australia. The UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) was established on October 7, 1950, with a seven nations membership, including Australia. The mandate extended beyond the previous UN Commission to Korea to now include: relief & rehabilitation; to bring about a 'unified, independent and democratic government for all Korea' (Chung, 2002, p. 24); and to advise the UN command on social and economic aspects.

UNCURK lasted until 1973. The UN document list indicates that Australia was a consistently active nation in submitting proposals regarding Korea during this period in the GA. For each proposal submitted by Australia and the anti-communist allies there were as many counter proposals submitted by USSR and its allies. As the conflict persisted on the peninsula the debate in the UN divided along ideological lines, and Australia was one of the most prominent protagonists from the West group of nations.

Thus the period during and after the Korean War saw a continued active Australian involvement in the Korean question in the UN, but the motives had changed from the earlier independent vision of world security and strong, independent small states– which challenged the hegemony of the dominant powers–into a policy of endorsing, representing and seeking to be closely associated with the Cold War policy of the USA. Compounding its own pro-British xenophobia and racist antipathy towards Asia, particularly the 'yellow peril' of China, and fearful of its own security under the expansion of communism across Asia, Australia used its role in the Korean question to assert its anti-communist doctrine and further cement its relationship with the USA. The signing of a formal security agreement between Australia, New Zealand and the United states, the ANZUS Treaty, which came into effect in April, 1952 had been made possible because of Australia's 'military aid readily and swiftly given' in the Korean war. However, I have noted above the somewhat contrived circumstances whereby the decision was made. One would have to argue that there was no particular interest in the welfare of Korea during this period, except to the extent that the Korea question served to promote Australia interests to the US. Confirming this thesis, events and the sacrifice of Australian lives in the Korean War were quickly forgotten from public memory as Australia enjoyed the benefits of post WWII economic,

population and social growth during the 1950s, such that the Korean conflict has become known as ‘the forgotten war’ (McCormack,). It was a time of television, motor cars and family values. Events in far away Asian societies were of little concern so long as government maintained the wall against communism.

The Malaise of Australian Foreign Policy in the Cold War

The foreign policy position that emerged after the Korean War continued into the next decade. In the UN Australia maintained a consistent advocacy for the ROK and an endorsement for the UN position in the three key areas:

- that the bulk of UN troops had been withdrawn from Korea and the rest (US troops) would follow when the UN conditions for a lasting settlement had been fulfilled. In fact, while the troops from other nations had been withdrawn, the US had consolidated its base in Korea, including nuclear weapons, and had further strengthened its military capacity in Japan, aimed at the communist states on the Asian mainland;
- that the UN had the authority to resolve the Korea question;
- that the goal of the Korea Question was to achieve, through peaceful means, a unified, independent and democratic Korea

[from 1.53 of the 1280th Plenary meeting, Dec 13, 1963; document available in Chung, 2003, pp.152–153].

Australia also consistently voted in favour of draft resolutions to invite to the UN debates on the Korea question a representative of the Republic of Korea and conditional invitations to a representative of DPRK. Typically South Korea accepted such invites. North Korea rejected the authority of the UN to deal with the Korea question. In fact North Korea, strategically, had become more politically active in the UN during this period. Consulting Chung’s (2002) compilation of ‘related document lists’ to items on the Korea Question, research indicates that in the early debates on the Korea question after the war, the related documents submitted were entirely from western allies and the first submissions from North Korea were through the USSR delegates. Just as Australia and other nations were responding around the Korea question according to their national positions, the USSR acted on behalf of its alliance with North Korea. Thus, it vetoed the ROK application for membership, through correspondence from President Syngman Rhee to the Secretary-General, at the 709th Plenary meeting on October 25, 1957. From the other side, the first sign of a direct correspondence from the DPRK government to the UN is October 3, 1957, when it sent a cablegram –perhaps a sign of haste–requesting participation in the debate over the Korea Question. It’s next cablegram was a year later on October 28, 1958, announcing the withdrawal of all Chinese troops from the north and requesting the complete withdrawal of US forces from the south.

The events of the 973rd meeting in 1958 reveal the way the Korea Question was mobilised as a major Cold War struggle in the UN and the positions of major actors, including Australia. The annual report of UNKRA was, as usual, the trigger for the debate over the Korea question. The large powers of the USA and USSR dominated the early discussions, with USSR focussing on the issue of representation of North Korea. North Korean correspondence was tabled. The USSR was busy, representing China as well as North Korea in these discussions. A draft resolution for North Korean representation was presented by the USSR and lost in the vote. A

counter resolution by the US for South Korean participation was passed. Then Australia and a host of western allies submitted a further resolution confirming the details of the US position. A counter amendment by India to also invite a representative from North Korea was lost in the vote. Therefore, it was decided to invite a representative of the ROK to participate in the discussion of the Korea question, without the right to vote (Chung, 2000, p.135).

The document list for following years show North Korea increasingly submitting correspondences directly to the UN without using its inter-mediator, the USSR, and making comments on UN affairs, particularly UNKRA reports. In these respects the DPRK legitimated the UN by engaging with its issues and processes, while at the same time holding to its initial policy that the Korea Question was not the legitimate business of the UN. In the 15th session of the UN, in December, 1961, the General Assembly reversed its previous decision and passed a resolution to invite North Korea to participate in the UN discussion, conditional upon it accepting the right and authority of the UN to determine the Korean question. Australia was one of the 15 powers that put this resolution forward. In rejecting this invitation North Korea responded that a conditional invitation was 'unjustified and contrary to the principles of the UN.'

The Australian position on the Korean Question in the UN, representing national foreign policy had reached the position described by analyst Watt:

Looking at the period 1956–60, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that policy had become stereotyped, that it proceeded along familiar routes and was simply continuing or repeating earlier initiatives without devising new techniques or discovering fresh possibilities. Prof Gordon Greenwood, President of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, quoted in Watt, 1970, p.303).

1966-1972 The Stalemate Period

By the mid-1960s the UN had grown considerably in membership (127 members by 1970) and had entered a period of complexity in which the 'in-built majority of inexperienced, weak, racially sensitive states' (Hudson, 1974, p.206) plus a number of tiny states which, however had the same voting powers as the powerful nations, dominated proceedings. Hudson describes the workings of the GA thus:

Annual sessions of the General Assembly had come to resemble well-rehearsed drill movements: long, turgid plenary speeches for home consumption, predictable agenda wrangles, predictable and annually repetitious committee debates on largely predictable draft resolutions (Hudson, 1974, p.207).

No question before the United Nations through this period more fitted this description than the annual round of resolutions on the Korean Question. During this period Australia became less engaged with UN issues. Australia had widened its international diplomacy network of embassies, and was thereby less reliant on contact with other nations at the UN. Moreover, Australia had raised its top foreign policy priority to ongoing strengthening of the American alliance, while relegating engagement with the UN body to that of a lesser concern. Its foreign policies issues

were on such matters as Vietnam, and the withdrawal of Britain from Asia – connected issues that pushed Australia closer to the USA, as the guarantor of security. Also connected to a lower profile were Australia's resistance to the Republic of China occupying the seat held by Taiwan and criticism of Australia's colonial role in managing the trusteeship of Papua New Guinea.

The principal debates in the General Assembly involving the Korea Question revolved around the following matters: the annual reports of UNCURK on the social, economic, and political developments in Korea; resolutions proposing to invite representatives from either South Korea or North Korea to the UN to take part in discussions on the Korean Question, without the right to vote. As considered above in the case of North Korea this participation was conditional that the DPRK first 'unequivocally accepts the competence and authority of the United Nations within the terms of the Charter to take action on the Korean question' (doc from the Chung p155), seeing that ROK had previously done so and continued to affirm its support for the UN process. However, Kim Il Sung's government continued to reject the right of the UN to consider and take action on the Korean Question. Moreover, a group of communist nations led by the USSR and including, from Asia, Cambodia and Mongolia, repeatedly made proposals for the dissolution of UNCURK and, indeed, that the UN remove the Korean Question from its agenda altogether. These proposals were rejected by the majority of nations in the General Assembly.

This annual round of proposals, counter proposals and replies from South and North Korea were conducted along Cold War divisions. Australia submitted regularly to the proposals in support of the ROK position and spoke in support to the resolutions in the General Assembly, while voting against the proposals from the communist camp. While there were few discussions in Australia over policy regarding Korea, as other issues such as Vietnam dominated discussions, the ideological blockade against North Korea was part of the Cold War and the defence of the 'free world' against communism. The adopted position on the Korea Question had by now developed over two decades and was seen, like the Berlin Wall, as one of the intractable aspects in the war against communism. The Korean Question had become part of a broader national policy whose strategy was directed in concert with the USA rather than the UN. That policy had been articulated by Richard Nixon before he became US President in 1969 as one of 'protecting' the independence of various Asian nations against the expansion of Red China, and North Korea was regarded as a strong ally of China.

In the UN the Australian government had once been a champion for the voices of the 'small nations' – when it had been an ambitious one out of a much smaller number – when it still believed in the superiority of Whiteness and its affinity in language, institutions and values with the UK and USA. Now it was a fading voice amid an assertive clamour from what was the new international movement of non-aligned nations, that at the Bandung, Indonesia conference in 1955 had identified themselves as the Third World. Thus during this period Australia pulled away from the UN, but, due to its Cold war position, and since South Korea was an ally in the war in Vietnam, Australia recognised that it had a role in supporting South Korea in the UN and was consistent in doing so.

Australia's New Internationalism and Impacts on the Korea Question 1972–1975

The period of the early 1970s brought radical changes to Australian defence and foreign policies with a new independent and internationalist perspective. The most active period of this time was between 1972–75 when a reformist Labour party government came to power, but the trend was under way from the beginning of the decade. The strategic doctrine on which Australia's defence policies were formulated changed from forward defence to more localised defence of the Australian mainland.

This period brought a resurgence of Australia's commitment to the UN and engagement with UN issues including the Korea Question. Two factors that generated this were the vote in October, 1971, supported by Australia, to allow the People's Republic of China to take the China seat in the UN, thereby excluding Taiwan, and the process set in place for full independence of Papua New Guinea in 1972, over which Australia had been strongly criticised in the UN for its colonial trusteeship. The removal of these barriers enabled Australia to remove itself from contentious issues that had obstructed its role as a UN member.

The election of the Labour party government under the visionary Gough Whitlam, who was also Minister for Foreign Affairs, in the words of historian Claire Clark 'heralded a significant change in policy attitudes to the United Nations and to a whole range of issues under debate in its forums' (Clarke, 1980, p.127). One aspect of this was a more assertive independent role that was willing to take a different position to that of the USA.

The period 1971–75 in the UN saw the admission of a number of states previously denied membership – Peoples Republic of China, East and West Germany, Bangla-Desh and Cambodia. Debates on membership of the two Koreas were attenuated during the 1971 and 1972 sessions due to the apparent progress of bi-lateral talks between the two Koreas. On July, 1972, the two Koreas announced a joint communication espousing three agreed principles of re-unification, the first of which was that unification should be achieved without external imposition or interference. On June 23, 1973 President Park announced that South Korea would not oppose North Korean participation in international organizations including the UN, where both Koreas could be separately represented. On the same day, Kim Il Sung announced a five-point peaceful unification program, including that North and South Korea should have a joint entry in the UN as the Federal Republic of Koryo.

Though still very divergent in details, these proposals for a peaceful process of re-unification were received positively by the UN. As a support for this process, and also acknowledging its failure to effectively resolve the Korean Question after some 23 years of existence, UNCURK was dissolved by consensus at the 2181st meeting of the General Assembly on November 28, 1973. Australia, which had been a member of UNCURK since its inception in 1950 was one of the co-sponsors for the resolution to dissolve UNCURK. This proposal originally contained a further recommendation that the Security Council would dissolve the UN Command over foreign troops in Korea. A counter proposal by communist-aligned nations called for the withdrawal of all foreign (i.e. US troops from Korea). Since neither proposal was going to be accepted Australia was one of the nations active in negotiating a consensus resolution, which was the one finally adopted, dissolving UNCURK and calling for continued dialogue between South and North Korea (Clark, 1980). In this role Australia, consistent with its new foreign policy agenda, played the role of an active, independent, broker in seeking a positive development in respect to the Korea question.

In late 1975 events at the UN pertaining to the situation of the UN Command role in Korea coincided with a major political crisis in Australia, perhaps the most explosive time in modern Australian history when the Labour Whitlam government was dismissed by the Governor-General on November 11 of that year. The UN proposal from the USA, with agreement from South Korea through its Permanent Observer to the UN, was to a reduction of direct UN command and that the UN flag be only flown over 'facilities directly associated with the implementation of the Armistice Agreement'. This effectively meant UN troops would continue to police the DMZ, while the US bases would identify themselves as such. The counter proposals from 43 states supporting the North Korean position was for the dissolution of the UN command and the withdrawal of all foreign troops under the UN flag, that is all US soldiers. In the initial vote on these draft resolutions, in the First Committee Australia voted for the proposal as supported by South Korea, while abstaining from the vote on the North Korean draft resolution.

Before the vote came to plenary of the General Assembly, events in Australia saw the Labour government sacked and a caretaker Liberal government installed, with a commitment to continue Labour policies until the coming election. However they reversed their position and voted against the pro-North Korea vote in the UN General Assembly vote on November 18. Historian Clarke (1980, p.134) claims the decision to abstain in the First Committee vote, in spite of earlier intentions to vote in favour of the pro-NK resolution, was taken personally by the Prime Minister because he would not 'encourage' a return to earlier rigid positions prior to 1973, but wanted to support a consensus approach by the two Koreas. However, in doing so, Australia went against US wishes, such that the final act of the Whitlam government in the UN was one of defiance of the US line on the Korea Question. So concerned was the caretaker government over this split with the USA that they then reversed the Labour decision and voted against the pro-North Korean proposal when it came before the plenary session. The action certainly must be seen in the light of US–Australian relations, for the relationship between Australia and North Korea was in poor shape, with North Korea withdrawing its diplomatic staff from Canberra on October 30 and expelling Australian staff from Pyongyang on November 6. Once again the Korean Question in the UN was a focus on Australian national politics and its broader foreign policy relations, especially with the USA.

Admission of Two Koreas to the UN

Chung (2002, p.204) observed that one of the consequences of the successful Seoul Olympics was that diplomatic relations between South Korea and both the USSR and China 'improved dramatically', such that they appeared likely to no longer use their veto powers in the security Council to prevent South Korean application for UN membership. With China's growing world economic presence and the role that President Gorbachev was playing in bringing the Soviet Empire to an end, so the trends were certainly in favour of the success of a South Korean admission to the UN. Consequently on May 27, 1991, the DPRK announced its agreement to separate membership of the two Koreas. Both states made separate applications and on September 17, 1991, both Koreas were admitted to their UN seats. Forty-four years of diplomatic struggle without representation, but through their allies was at an end. Australia, which had engaged with the Korean Question through the changing prism

of its internal politics and foreign policy was one of the 143 nations that sponsored the resolution.

Conclusion

This preliminary review of the patterns of Australian engagement with the Korean Question at the United Nations shows a consistent support for South Korea in proposals of resolutions, voting on resolutions and activities in agencies and committees of the UN that were involved in aspects of the issues of Korea independence, democratization, reunification and participation in the United Nations. Certainly one would have to conclude that Australia has been a persistent friend and supporter of South Korea in dealing with these issues during those decades when South Korea did not have representation in the UN and its fate was determined by the actions of other nations who were members. Similarly the Australian position on North Korea was predominantly one of opposition to its wishes, but the records show that from the early 1970s Australia began to establish a role as broker in search of consensus positions –which is basically a role that current Australian foreign policy seeks to play in contemporary issues such as that of North Korean nuclear weapons.

The analysis of the Australian role in the UN has also uncovered the changing positions of Australia in respect to the Korea Question, as responses to changes in domestic politics in Australia, such as government under different parties, the impacts of important individuals especially Evatt, Menzies and Whitlam and, most significantly, changes in foreign policy as Australia adopted new perspectives that benefited Australia in response to changing international contexts. This analysis suggests that rather than any particular concern or relationship with Korea, such as historical or cultural ties, the Australian engagement with the Korean Question in the UN through this period was pragmatic and self-interested, such that Australia sought to exploit the circumstances of Korea's exclusion from the UN to benefit its own international identity and influence as a middle power.

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