Ron Robin, "Behavioral Codes and Truce Talks: Images of the Enemy and Expert Knowledge in the Korean Armistice Negotiations," ***Diplomatic History,*** **Volume 25, Issue 4 (Fall 2001): 625-646**.

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When I began research on the Korean War in 1973, histories of the conflict as a rule began the same way. "Just before dawn on 25 June 1950, the Communist army of North Korea launched a massive surprise attack across the 38th parallel with the goal of conquering South Korea." Most studies provided a detailed narrative, almost exclusively from the perspective of the United States, for only the first year of the war. There was little coverage of the conflict after President Harry S. Truman's decision to relieve General Douglas MacArthur in April 1951. Despite the fact that nearly half of the casualties and much of the physical destruction of North Korea came during the last two years of the fighting, studies of the Korean War either ignored this period entirely or treated it as little more than an afterthought.

Those who have paid any attention to the literature on the Korean War since the middle of the 1970s know that everything has changed. Most important, a long overdue emphasis on exploring the origins of the Korean War before 25 June 1950 began and gained increasing momentum, resulting in the publication of a steady stream of articles and books that shattered what had been a framework of analysis reinforcing outdated Cold War assumptions. In particular, Bruce Cumings published in 1981 the first volume of his _Origins of the Korean War_, arguing that the conflict was a classic civil war. During the 1980s, histories of the Korean War always included at least one chapter at the outset discussing the years prior to 1950 and, although the emphasis varied, documenting the domestic origins of the Korean War.

By 1990, many Korean War scholars were reemphasizing the role of international factors in explaining the outbreak and course of the conflict in Korea, despite the publication that year of the second volume of Cumings' _Origins of the Korean War_. But more important, a consensus had emerged that an accurate understanding of the Korean War required dating its origins from at least as early as 1945, if not before World War II. Already, scholars were reassessing previous views because of information trickling out of the People's Republic of China in the form of interviews, personal accounts, and some documents. It was the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, that reenergized and altered the focus of the discourse because of Russia's release of previously unavailable Soviet documents. Since then, the debate has been intense on three issues: the exact reasons for North Korea's attack; the factors surrounding Chinese intervention; and the actions of both sides in the pursuit of an armistice agreement.

Members of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) will recall that a "Symposium on the Korean War" was held in conjunction with the 2000 Annual Convention in Toronto. The papers delivered there reflected the current focus of the debate in the literature on the Korean War and will be published in 2002 in a special edition of the _Journal of Conflict

Studies_. My contribution, to be self-serving, offers a reexamination of the Acheson speech, demonstrating through the use of Soviet documents, that references to the "defensive perimeter" had absolutely no impact on the Communist decision-making that led to the North Korean attack. In addition to two articles examining Chinese intervention by Michael Sheng and Zhang Xiaobing, John Jenks will be contributing an essay on the truce talks. An anthology comprised of papers from a conference at Virginia Military Institute in October 2000 and edited by Paul G. Pierpaoli is near publication with contents that reflect this same pattern of analytical focus. And so, the debate continues, although not on the issues that for two decades after the armistice dominated literature in the field.

It was then with great interest that I began reading Ron Robin's article in the most recent issue of _Diplomatic History_ titled "Behavioral Codes and the Truce Talks: Images of the Enemy and Expert Knowledge in the Korean Armistice Negotiations." Robin's purpose is to reexamine the description Rosemary Foot presents in her important book _Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks_ (1990) of "the American team as a grim, intransigent crew comprised of ill-prepared and unimaginative military officers . . . [who] were cryptoracists. . . . Lacking in cultural sensitivity and suspicious of engaging the enemy outside of traditional battlefields, these officers allegedly bore responsibility for aggravating an already dismal situation. Their recourse to ultimatums rather than negotiations, their gratuitous aggressiveness, and their limited intellectual horizons brought the already burdened process to a virtual standstill" (p. 626). Robin seeks "to move beyond the dismissal of U.S. negotiators as narrow-minded philistines, and the description of events at Panmunjom as a pale reflection of distant decisions" (p. 627).

Robin maintains that "conventional interpretation" fails to acknowledge the initial triumphs of the American team, including adoption of the U.S. draft for an agenda, movement of the talks from Kaesong to Panmunjom, and acceptance of the U.S. proposal for the demarcation of the battle line. What especially caught my attention at the outset was his assertion that negotiations had progressed well enough during the first six months so that by January 1952, agreement on an armistice only required resolution of the prisoner of war (POW) issue. My article on the truce talks in Pierpaoli's forthcoming anthology makes the same point, emphasizing not the intransigence of the negotiators, but rather their genuine desire for compromise to achieve agreement on those issues not related to preserving national image and political influence. For Robin, however, the "crucial" factor was that "U.S. negotiators were cognizant of their limitations and . . . demonstrated an intellectual openmindedness that belies their conventional historical portrayal" (p. 627). Unfortunately, the author does not provide much substantive evidence in this article to support this contention.

Readers familiar with the Korean War armistice negotiations will be disappointed with this article because Robin makes few references to events at Kaesong and Panmunjom. His focus instead is on describing the theories, opinions, and advice of academic consultants who provided the U.S. negotiators with "an intriguing psychological paradigm" based in behavioral theory that was "indispensable . . . for deciphering an inscrutable adversary and contributed significantly to the early triumphs of the negotiation team" (p. 627). The author's main accomplishment is to describe an operational code explaining Communist behavior developed by Nathan Leites, Soviet expert at the RAND Corporation, and published as _The Operational Code of the

Politburo_. On 24 August 1951, Herbert Goldhamer, a disciple of Leites, became RAND's representative at the truce talks, allegedly teaching the American negotiators "the art of bargaining" (p. 630). RAND published Goldhamer's recollections as _The Armistice Conference: A Personal Memoir_ in 1994. Robin relies almost exclusively on this source to support his contentions.

Robin's description of Leites' theory under the subheading "Psychopolitics and the Operational Code" is enlightening, providing insights on how the Cold War influenced thinking in the field of behavioral theory in the 1950s. Following the advice of Harold Lasswell, behavioral scientists at RAND utilized psychoanalysis to explain the conduct of political elites. Leites, a Lasswell student, "developed the notion of the 'operational code,' a psychological template for understanding the political behavior of the nation's Communist adversaries" (p. 631). Soviet leaders were "ruthless, fanatical, and psychotic" (p. 632) because of an "operational code" that had its origins in the years before the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. Robin notes later that "Leites's assessments of the enemy were gleaned from, or at least reflected, George Kennan's highly acclaimed discursions into the sources of Soviet conduct" (p. 641). But moving well beyond Kennan, Leites also speculated that the Soviet obsession with destroying its adversaries was a "'classical paranoid defense against latent homosexuality'" (p. 633). Goldhamer brought these ideas to Korea, distributing copies of _The Operational Code_ to the American team. According to Robin, the U.S. negotiators adopted Leites' analytical framework for dealing with their Asian Communist adversaries, believing they were "replicas of the Russian original" (p. 634). So far, so good.

After describing the twenty simplified rules of Communist conduct that guided the American negotiators, Robin then discusses Goldhamer's application of behavioral theory to the U.S. team. Its operational code had as its "most dominant characteristic" an "insatiable craving to be liked by both friend and foe" (p. 639) that led to unnecessary concessions. I have no problem accepting the author's description in either case. But he provides only circumstantial evidence to support his claim that Goldhamer's advice determined the behavior of the U.S. negotiators until his departure from Korea in late November 1951. Moreover, Robin's claim that thereafter "the U.S. delegates relied heavily on Goldhamer's presentation of Leites's _Operational Code_" (p. 642) is entirely speculative. The author writes as if neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff nor the State Department, let alone General Matthew B. Ridgway, the UN commander, even existed. According the Robin, the best evidence of the U.S. team's dominance of the negotiations and its following "Goldhamer's advice ad absurdum occurred on 28 April 1952, when U.S. delegates offered their adversaries a final and nonnegotiable package proposal" (p. 644). But this proposal originated in Washington, Ridgway opposed it, and it was not presented as a final, non-negotiable ultimatum.

This article is seriously flawed in other ways. I do not contest Robin's claim that "Goldhamer introduced key behavioral theories into the minds of U.S. negotiations" (p. 628). However, the author presents very little substantive evidence "that an authoritative psychological profile of the enemy reframed the agenda and bargaining strategies of U.S. negotiators and contributed to both their triumphs and their failings" (p. 627). Robin identifies as a success the adoption of the U.S. proposal for an agenda, but this issue was settled before Goldhamer's arrival. It was Ridgway, not the U.S. team, that insisted on changing the venue from Kaesong to Panmunjom. If this was

the result of the "operational code" then why was Ridgway at that time pressing for Goldhamer's return to the United States? Only the resolution of the demarcation line issue can be credited to Goldhamer's advice. Contradicting Robin's claim that Goldhamer's views continued to influence the negotiations after his departure was the genuine bargaining that occurred regarding inspection provisions and a postwar political conference. Robin mentions neither, but in each case the U.S. negotiators hardly behaved in accordance with rules derived from Leites operational code.

Robin appears unfamiliar with basic information about the truce talks. In addition to the points raised thus far, a key provision of the package proposal was not U.S. acceptance of "inclusion of Communist nations on the proposed neutral nation cease-fire supervisory board [sic!!]", but rather exclusion of the Soviet Union. "By insisting on voluntary repatriation," the author contends, the "U.S. negotiators believed that they could extract a symbolic victory from what was, in essence, an embarrassing stalemate" (p. 644). The American delegates were not the originators, but rather the implementers of this policy decision. It was President Harry S. Truman who insisted upon voluntary repatriation, not the negotiators at Panmunjom. Scant evidence appears in this article to back Robin's grandiose claim that "there is little doubt that the actual dynamics of the negotiating process were the creation of the delegates in the field, whose attitudes, image of the enemy, and personalities had an overwhelming effect on the armistice talks, their momentum, and the results" (pp. 644-645). Goldhamer's recollections and selected references to Vice-Admiral C. Turner Joy's memoirs alone are simply not enough to make a convincing, let alone compelling, case.

Sources in fact constitute a major source of my dissatisfaction with this article. Except for Foot's book--for which Robin provides an inaccurate title--and of course Goldhamer's, the author incorporates little information from previous writings on the Korean armistice negotiations. There also are no references to translated Soviet documents appearing in several issues of the Cold War International History Project _Bulletin_. Robin could have made use of an important article that was printed there on the truce talks by Kathryn Weathersby. More disturbing is the absence of any references to the _Foreign Relations_ series, let alone other primary documents directly related to the armistice negotiations. There are citations for a variety of sources on behavioral theory, but it would seem essential to refer to specific exchanges between the delegates at the negotiations about specific issues to prove that an operational code in fact had some impact on the course and outcome of the truce talks. I do agree with Robin that the operational code produced a strategy that failed because it dismissed the complexity of culture and was therefore "first and foremost an exercise in escapism" p. 646). I would agree as well that Leites' and Goldhamer's "psychoanalytical portrait of the enemy was pure conjecture; it had no meaningful empirical basis" (p. 645). Unfortunately, this last quotation also comes close to explaining why Robin's article is such a disappointment.

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