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**GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY AND THE KOREAN WAR: A STUDY
IN MODERN STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCE**

BY

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GEN Omar Bradley and the Korean War: A Study in Modern
Strategic Leader Competence

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ABSTRACT

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This study analyses General Omar Bradley's leadership as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the first three weeks of the Korean War from the perspective of modern strategic leader competencies presented in Field Manual (FM) 22-103 Strategic Leader(draft). The author concludes that by current standards General Bradley's leadership would be considered incompetent. His leadership during the first few weeks of the Korean War demonstrated interpersonal, technical and conceptual incompetence. The significance of this is that despite Bradley's thirty-five years of service, he was apparently ill prepared to assume the duties of a strategic leader during the early days of America's position as a world super power.

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As a generalization, for most Army officers the Korean War evokes images of General MacArthur and his famous landing at Inchon. Perhaps his subsequent defeat by the Chinese at the Yalu River, and his relief by President Truman come to mind as well. Few of us, however, ever associate General Bradley with the war in Korea. Rather, we associate Bradley with World War Two, in the European Theater, along with his friends Patton and Eisenhower. And of course, we associate Bradley with the Army's Infantry Fighting Vehicle, which bears his name. For most of us, he is kind of an icon, the last of the five star generals.

This is surprising because General Bradley played a key role in the Korean War. From the war's beginning in 1950 through to its end in 1953, Bradley was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As such, he was a central figure in nearly all the war's decisions, to include the decision to commit the United States in the war in Korea in the first place. A war, it should be noted, against a country that the United States did not plan to fight.

As has been suggested, common memory of the war has left Bradley's role generally unknown and unappreciated. Common memory is not alone, however, in overlooking Bradley's role in the war. Most historians speak little of Bradley, and focus their attention instead on MacArthur. This is understandable

given that MacArthur was the theater commander, and Bradley the president's senior military advisor.

If one does spend some attention to Bradley's role and performance during the Korean War, the findings are rather interesting. They are especially so when one analyzes his performance from the perspective of current views on strategic leadership such as those contained in Field Manual (FM) 22-103 Strategic Leadership (draft). From this perspective, one comes to the following conclusion: General Bradley's strategic leadership during the first weeks of the Korean War was incompetent. He failed to demonstrate interpersonal, technical, and conceptual competence expected of a modern strategic leader.

The significance of this conclusion is that despite a wealth of tactical experience, gained over nearly thirty-five years of service, General Bradley was apparently ill prepared for his duties as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Bradley's example supports the contention, presented in FM 22-103, that strategic leader competencies transcend tactical leader skills, and warrant additional skills as well as a broad frame of reference development.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CONCEPTS

This case study rests on three propositions. They are the key concepts that form the basis of the ideas presented in FM 22-103. While it is possible to defend them, for the sake of brevity, we'll assume them to be valid. This is because our purpose is to examine General Bradley's leadership, and not to argue in favor of FM 22-103's particular views of strategic leadership competencies. The three propositions are:

- It is possible to define a specific set of leadership competencies
- Strategic leader competency differs from tactical leader competency in scope and content
- Strategic leader competency rests on mastery of tactical leadership competence

Of these the most significant is the premise that strategic leadership requires additional skills and competencies than those required of tactical leaders. FM 22-103 organizes these additional skills under three general categories: interpersonal, technical, and conceptual. Within each general category there are specific competencies. Because we will use these concepts to analyze Bradley's leadership later, we'll address each one, beginning with interpersonal competence.¹

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE

Most of us would agree that interpersonal skills are required of all leaders, be they corporals or generals. Most of us would also agree that the ability to get along with people is a useful skill. However, for leading at the strategic level, FM 22-103 maintains that interpersonal skills are not nice to have, but are essential. Furthermore, FM 22-103 identifies three specific interpersonal competencies: consensus building, negotiating, and communicating.²

Consensus building is an essential strategic leadership skill for one reason: Strategic leaders, unlike leaders at tactical and operational levels, must lead and interact with their peers. At the strategic level leading peers is not a nice-to-do-if-you-want-to-do-it issue. It is a requirement. It is part of the strategic leader's environment. The fact of the matter is that at the highest levels of each military service strategic leaders routinely lead people who are subordinate to them only by position. They are not subordinate in rank or experience. For example, the Army Chief of Staff (CSA), a four star general, leads "subordinates" who are also four star generals. Consequently, when the CSA issues orders to his subordinates, the orders are not given in the manner of a sergeant to a private, or a captain to a lieutenant. Rather, the CSA issue the order as a peer passing on legally authorized

directives to another peer. In fact, most of the directives strategic leaders promulgate are usually done only after gaining consensus, or at least soliciting and considering significant suggestions, from those who will execute the directives. This is quite a different case than in tactical level leadership where support for an order is useful, but not required.³

The next interpersonal competency, negotiating skills, reflect the fact that strategic leaders deal with problems and issues that are not always black and white. They are usually issues that offer a variety of solutions. Consequently, strategic leaders must be capable of negotiating with their peers on which solution they should adopt. Without peer leadership and negotiating skills, consensus building would be nearly impossible to achieve.⁴

The importance of communication as an interpersonal skill is self-evident. If a strategic leader cannot present his ideas logically and reasonably, in print as well as in person, it is unlikely that he'll be able to negotiate or to build consensus. At the strategic level, the leader must be able to also communicate with those outside of the organization. This is not a skill usually required of tactical leaders, but is vital to strategic leadership. The requirement for senior military leaders to testify before Congress is a prime example of this skill.⁵

TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

Just as interpersonal skills are different at the strategic level so too are technical skills different. A strategic leader's technical competence requires a thorough understanding of various systems within government, the Department of Defense, and other military services. Merely understanding how one's own branch of service works is entirely insufficient. Without this technical knowledge of systems, the strategic leader will be unable to participate effectively in the interagency process that drives national policy and strategy. In the strategic arena, leaders must be able to effectively articulate a balanced and reasoned case for national security interests that cut across all strata of government. The strategic leader must be able to clearly explain requirements, costs, benefits and risks to this wide audience that develops policy and approves strategy.⁶

CONCEPTUAL COMPETENCE

FM 22-103 asserts that conceptual competence is the most important all the strategic leader competencies. Conceptual competence involves three skills: frame of reference development, problem management, and, the most critical, envisioning the future. These skills enable a strategic leader to effectively deal with the extraordinary complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty that characterizes the modern world. As a

result of this environment, strategic leaders find themselves confronted with issues that offer multiple solutions. None of which are totally right or totally wrong. Given this challenge the leader must seek the best long-term solution within the resources available. He must be able to avoid short-term solutions that appear acceptable, but that may hide many second and third order effects that can be catastrophic in the long-term.⁷

To do this the strategic leader must have a broad frame of reference. A frame of reference is the complex body of knowledge that forms the basis of a person's observation and judgement. FM 22-103 argues that to be an effective strategic leader, one must constantly develop his frame of reference. This is done through schooling, self-study and experience. Additionally, a strategic leader must be able to comfortably deal with the abstract, complicated nature of the strategic environment.⁸

Problem management is the ability to effectively make decisions at the strategic level. Unlike decision making at the tactical level, strategic leaders must seek solutions that focus on and offer the best long-term benefits. One must be able to anticipate unintended consequences, and be on the watch for second and third order effects that are often hidden in seemingly feasible courses of action. Additionally, problem

management requires the ability to select solutions can be flexibly adjusted as the situation changes over the course of time. In short, problem management is not, as it is at the tactical level, a matter of selecting one option and vigorously seeing it through to completion.⁹

Of all the conceptual competencies contained in FM 22-103, the "sine qua none" of an effective strategic leader is the ability to envision the future. The reason is simple. When a strategic leader envisions the future, he gives the organization its long-term focus, direction, identity, and purpose. The leader's vision sets the stage for everything the organization does or will do. The long-term vision enables the organization to make decisions that focus on the best long-term benefit. Without vision, an organization is leaderless.¹⁰

Inherent in developing a vision is the requirement to understand and balance the desired end with the resources available or required. In short, the strategic leader's vision reflects a coherent balance of ends, ways, and means. Without this skill, the vision will remain only a hallow slogan that has no hope for realization. The envisioned end will never be achieved. Moreover, the strategic leader must be able to develop a supporting strategy to achieve his vision. This strategy presents short and mid-term objectives that keep the

organization on track as it confronts changes in the daily environment.¹¹

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND TO THE KOREAN WAR

From the end of World War Two in 1945 until the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, Americans experienced a world of change, challenge and uncertainty. The United States saw the victory of World War Two mutate into a Cold War against the Soviet Union. Communism seemed to be on the march everywhere. In 1946 the Soviets challenged the sovereignty and independence of Iran and Turkey in the Middle East. In 1948 the Soviets attempted to blockade the Western Allies from Berlin. In 1949, just when it appeared that things couldn't get worse, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear devise, and China fell to communist rule. All the while, Greece fought desperately to defeat a tough communist insurgency.¹²

In reaction to these events President Harry Truman did several things. First, he announced the so-called Truman doctrine, whereby the United States would offer assistance to nations fighting communist insurgencies. Second, he announced the European Recovery Plan--the Marshall Plan--whereby the United States would offer massive economic aid to all nations as a means of offsetting despair and revolution. Third, and most significantly, he formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a way to deter Soviet aggression in Western Europe.

Consequently, by 1948 the United States had, with the promulgation of National Security Council document 20/4 (NSC 20/4), adopted a policy of containing Soviet expansion throughout the world¹³

In January 1950, reflecting the containment policy and the desire to encourage collective security in the Far East, Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared a pacific defensive line. The line ran from Alaska to Japan to the Philippines. Acheson declared that nations beyond this line had to rely on themselves to resist foreign aggression until such time as the UN (not the US) could come to their assistance. Quite intentionally, the fledgling Republic of South Korea, from which American military forces--less advisors--had departed in 1949 fell outside the defense line. Both the Department of State and the Defense Department thought Korea was of no strategic value in a general war against the Soviet Union.¹⁴

In April 1950, the State Department submitted a lengthy memorandum, known to history as NSC 68. This document updated and expanded the ideas presented in NSC 20/4. Perhaps most significantly, NSC 68 recommended that the United States build up its military might, at levels unheard of in peacetime.¹⁵

Since becoming president in 1945, Truman consistently cut military spending. He continued to do so despite the fact that he had accepted containment as a policy in 1948 with NSC 20/4.

When the first Secretary of Defense, James F. Forrestal, committed suicide, Truman replaced him with Louis A. Johnson. Johnson's mission was to cut the military even more severely. However NSC 68 made such a strong case for increased spending that Truman began to doubt the wisdom of his earlier defense cuts. Still, Truman was not sure of the need, at least not in the spring of 1950, to increase defense spending. By July 1950 the need would be all too apparent.¹⁶

Eisenhower, as the first leader of the newly formed Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), developed a military strategy to support the policy of containment. The strategy focused around a number of war plans aimed at defeating the Soviet Union in a general war in Europe. Consequently, Europe was again, as during World War Two, America's strategic main effort. American forces elsewhere in the world would remain on the defensive. While there was severe interservice rivalry on how this war should be fought, the JCS agreed with Eisenhower's strategic vision: The next war would be against the Soviet Union in Europe.¹⁷

Unfortunately, the president and congress didn't provide the funds to support Eisenhower's vision—at least not totally. Both the president and congress did, however, like the strategy's emphasis on strategic bombing. Unlike the Navy and Army, strategic bombing forces were cheap. Consequently, the United

States continued to cut the Army and the Navy budgets while still subscribing to a policy of containment.¹⁸

By 1950 the Army had become a mere shadow of its World War Two self. It went from eighty nine to ten divisions, each at approximately 70% strength. Its actual strength was the equivalent of seven full combat divisions. Training was done poorly, if at all. The Air Force had cut most of its tactical fighters and ground support organizations in order to maximize its strategic bomber strength. The Navy too was severely cut, with the Marine Corps reduced to barely two divisions. The National Guard and Army Reserve were also under strength and not well trained. From a military perspective, the worst eventuality would be to enter into a conventional ground war.¹⁹

During this time, General Bradley was at the eye of the storm. In 1948, he became the Army Chief of Staff, and by 1949, he moved up to become the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS). Bradley replaced Eisenhower in both of these jobs. He describes these years in Washington as the most unpleasant of his entire career. What bothered him the most was that he knew the Army was in bad shape. But, by his own admission, he was unable to do anything to change the situation for the better.²⁰

In June 1950, Bradley and the Secretary of Defense went to visit MacArthur in Japan for a second time, the first being in

January with the entire JCS. Bradley claims he took both trips primarily to improve his relationship with General MacArthur. Apparently, their relationship had become somewhat strained during Bradley's time as the CSA. In any event, both visits went well. At end of the June trip, Bradley promised MacArthur that he'd share their agreement over the importance of Formosa's defense with President Truman. Bradley also says in his autobiography that he and MacArthur agreed on the fact that in a war against the Soviet Union, Korea played no significant role. Ironically, Bradley returned to the United States on 24 June, for on 25 June the unexpected occurred--the North Korean's invaded South Korea.²¹

THE NORTH KOREAN INVASION AND AMERICA'S RESPONSE

The North Korean invasion of South Korea came as a complete and utter shock to the United States. By all estimates, to include those done by the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the North Koreans did not intend to actually invade the south. Most analysts thought a guerrilla war might come to pass, but never an invasion--at least not in 1950.²² The senior American military advisor to Korea (the Korean Military Advisor Group, KMAG) thought the Korean Army was well prepared and well equipped to handle an insurgency. In fact, the KMAG

spoke highly of the Republic of Korea's (ROK) constabulary, claiming it was excellent.²³

When Secretary of State Acheson called President Truman (who was in Missouri) to inform him of the invasion, the Pentagon had but a vague and unclear picture of the overall situation. The president gave Acheson the lead in formulating a recommendation on how the United States should respond to the invasion. According to Acheson, it appeared that President Truman was determined to do something if the reports of invasion were correct.²⁴

Truman returned to Washington the next day, 25 June, and met with his principle advisors that evening. Earlier in the day Secretary of State Dean Acheson led an interagency working group that included Secretary of the Army Frank Pace Jr.; the Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, and the Army G3, General Timberman, to piece together a consolidated recommendation for the president's consideration. Significantly though, the CIA was not included in the meeting.²⁵

At the meeting with the president that night, Secretary Acheson led the discussion. He strongly urged President Truman to support South Korea immediately with both economic aid and military force. Acheson said that the United States must simultaneously enlist the support of the United Nations in defeating the invasion. He added that the United States should

also increase military aid to the French in Indochina, and increase U.S. military presence in the Philippines. He also thought it was a good idea to send a carrier task force to Formosa to keep both China and Formosa from fighting.²⁶

Secretary Johnson and General Bradley spoke next. They attempted to focus the discussion on the strategic importance of Formosa. At Johnson's direction, Bradley began to read verbatim MacArthur's memorandum on Formosa. Bradley and Johnson feared that the attack in Korea might only be a diversion from the real attack by Communist Chinese against Nationalist Formosa. MacArthur's memorandum spelled out the strategic importance of Formosa to the Pacific's defense against the Soviet Union. Acheson, with the President's concurrence, quickly returned the discussion to Korea. The president wanted to know the likelihood of Soviet intervention into Korea. Was the attack a full Soviet move, or a mere test of America's resolve? If the United States became involved, how would Communist China and the Soviet Union react?²⁷

General Bradley and General Collins said they thought Soviet intervention was unlikely. Both thought the Soviet Union was too weak to confront the United States at that time, especially in Korea. Had the CIA been present, they would have no doubt agreed with the assessment.²⁸

Both the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations thought U.S. air and naval forces would help the South Koreans defeat the invasion. Collins disagreed. He felt that it might be necessary to commit some American ground troops. He went on to say that if this were the case, there would be a need to initiate some sort of partial mobilization. General Bradley echoed Collins' comments, but added nothing of any substance. Significantly, neither Bradley nor Collins pointed out the general weakness of American ground forces to engage in conventional operations.²⁹

By the time the meeting ended, Acheson, Johnson and Bradley, along with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supported the idea of sending supplies and ammunition to the South Koreans. They also thought it a good idea to have MacArthur assess the overall situation, and forward recommendations to the JCS. They also supported the idea of allowing U.S. air and naval forces to provide cover for the evacuation of American citizens, limiting the operations south of the 38th parallel. However, ground troops were not to be used other than to secure the port at Pusan. In closing the meeting, General Bradley summarized the group's attitude by saying that Korea was a good place to draw the line against communism. He didn't explain the reason why.³⁰

In reviewing this critical meeting we can see that no one raised the issue of what exactly the United States wanted to

accomplish in South Korea--other than to help the Koreans defeat the invasion. No one in the JCS questioned the impact this action might have on the overall strategy of "Europe first", or containment in general. Not a single military advisor in the room raised an objection to the total reversal of policy, and the abandonment of detailed analysis that concluded that Korea was not of any strategic value. Apparently, the unstated assumption every military person made was that with some limited immediate assistance, the South Koreans would be able to defeat the invasion.³¹

After the president's meeting concluded, General Collins quickly drafted a message that summarized the president's decision for General MacArthur. Anticipating this order, MacArthur already had crews loading ships with ammunition, and the FEC Air Force enroute to Korea. MacArthur also dispatched an advanced reconnaissance team to clarify the situation.³²

On 30 June, following a personal reconnaissance the day before, MacArthur gave his recommendation to the JCS on what to do in Korea. (This was done real time via telecom. Consequently the teleconference began at 0330 a.m. Washington time.) MacArthur began by insisting that U.S. air and naval forces alone could not defeat the invasion. The South Korean Army was falling apart, and lacked the necessary leadership to offer effective resistance. Therefore, if the United States wished to

retain a foothold on the Korean Peninsula, he must be authorized to send at least a Regimental Combat Team (RCT) north to delay the enemy's advance south. He also stated the intention to mount a two division counteroffensive as soon as possible. As MacArthur saw it, the enemy's rapid advance required him to fight north of Pusan, if he were to effectively maintain a bridgehead around Pusan. MacArthur added that time was of the essence. If he were allowed to act immediately, he would be able to create the conditions necessary for a counteroffensive and to quickly defeat the invasion.³³

Collins told MacArthur that his request for the RCT, and the intent to commit a two division follow on force, would require presidential approval. He added that the president would also want to confer with the JCS. MacArthur responded by saying, once again, time was of the essence. He stressed that it was imperative that a decision be made immediately on whether the United States wished to prevent South Korea from being overrun. The enemy was continuing his advance to Pusan unchecked.³⁴

Collins forwarded MacArthur's request through the Secretary of the Army to President Truman, adding his strong recommendation to support MacArthur's plan. Truman quickly agreed to MacArthur's request to send one RCT north into the combat zone. Any further troop deployments, however, would be

authorized later, after consultations with the JCS--if at all. Collins so informed MacArthur.³⁵

A few hours after MacArthur's early morning telecom with Collins, Truman met with the NSC to consider MacArthur's suggestion to commit a two-division force to Korea. With virtually no discussion, the JCS recommended approving MacArthur's request. Quite unexpectedly, the president then asked Bradley why MacArthur shouldn't be allowed to commit his entire four divisions to Korea in order to ensure he had enough force to completely defeat of the invasion? Bradley offered no counter to the president's question. The only issue raised was done later, with the Secretary of Defense. Specifically, the issue concerned the need to defend Japan, which was MacArthur's primary mission, with new mission to also defend Korea. To resolve this dilemma, the JCS recommended that MacArthur should determine how this would be done based on the situation and his judgement. The entire meeting lasted less than thirty minutes. With little discussion or analysis, the United States committed itself to a ground war in Korea.³⁶

On 5 July, a battalion size unit, known to history as Task Force Smith, the lead element of the RCT MacArthur requested on 30 June, made contact with the North Korean army. By 6 July the North Korean defeated Task Force Smith, forcing it to withdraw south. By 9 July the 24th Infantry Division, the first American

division deployed from Japan, was also defeated and forced to withdraw south as well. The American efforts delayed and weakened the communist advance, but with significant U.S. casualties. Not surprising, the South Korean Army was also in a headlong retreat south, moving ever closer to Pusan.³⁷

MacArthur's headquarters dutifully kept the Pentagon abreast of the rapidly deteriorating situation. But nothing could have prepared Washington for MacArthur's 7 July situation report and request for immediate reinforcements. They were staggering. He needed an additional four divisions, and an additional Army headquarters, with supporting troops, to stop the North Korean attack. MacArthur's requests were so unexpected, and so monumental in scope, that the president directed the JCS to immediately send a team to reevaluate the situation.³⁸

General Collins and General Hoyt Vandenberg, the Air Force Chief of Staff, arrived in Tokyo on 13 July. MacArthur immediately briefed them on the situation and his future plans. He stressed that the North Koreans were tough soldiers, well lead, well trained and well equipped. They were not to be underestimated in their skill, or their desire to win.³⁹

MacArthur explained his campaign plan. First, he would defeat the North Korean attack by defending around Pusan. Next, he would conduct an amphibious assault at Inchon with a

reinforced division, cut the enemy's lines of communication and then capture Seoul. While this would destroy the bulk of the enemy forces, MacArthur anticipated the need to cross the 38th parallel to ensure their defeat. He wasn't sure if he'd have to occupy North Korea, it was too early to say. The important point was to hold Pusan, and to get reinforcements into the theater immediately. MacArthur stressed that time was of the essence.⁴⁰

After listening to MacArthur's briefing, General Collins pointed out the Army only had five divisions and a few separate regiments left in General Reserve. He also emphasized that the United States had commitments else where in the world, not just in Korea. Collins also reminded MacArthur that the American main effort was still Europe. Finally, Collins said that while he appreciated the general's idea of an amphibious landing in the enemy's rear, he wasn't sure that Inchon was the wisest place to execute it.⁴¹

MacArthur responded by saying he understood America's war plan, but asked that Collins send all that he could. Collins said he would. MacArthur concluded by saying that if the United States won in Korea, it would be a victory everywhere against communism. A firm stand now in Korea would prevent future aggression elsewhere in the world. Collins agreed.⁴²

On 14 July Collins returned to Washington and briefed the president and the JCS on his observations and recommendations. He said he didn't think MacArthur needed an additional Army headquarters, or an additional four divisions. But what Collins did recommend was considerable: the entire 2d Infantry Division, most of the 3d Infantry Division's leadership (to replace leader casualties), an airborne RCT (in essence the entire 11th Airborne Division), and an assortment of other RCTs (from the Pacific and the United States). He also recommended that the President activate four National Guard divisions, and thousands of Reservists as part of a partial mobilization effort. Finally, Collins thought the 82d Airborne should remain in General Reserve, and not be earmarked for Korea, but, instead, be held for any action in Europe. President Truman approved Collins recommendation.⁴³

In order to meet Collin's recommendation, the Army had to dismantle its General Reserve, and strip its training base. As a result, all that remained to confront the Soviets in Europe was the 1st Infantry Division (which was already stationed in Germany), the 82d Airborne Division, one Armored Division (less many tank battalions). Most significantly, the Army lost its ability to expand because it literally threw experienced men into combat.⁴⁴

As strange as it may seem now, no one in the JCS thought to seriously challenge the wisdom of committing so many resources to Korea, given that the strategy of defending Europe had not changed. At congressional hearings a year later, after MacArthur's relief, Bradley and others all said they were very worried about the risk of war in Europe. Yet, in June and July 1950, none of them shared these misgivings with any force or sound analysis.⁴⁵

Often overlooked too is the fact that the JCS never issued MacArthur a new mission statement. Officially, MacArthur's mission remained the defense of Japan. The JCS never gave MacArthur an objective, or a new mission to support the State Department's UN's 27 June resolution to restore peace in the region. What is also overlooked is that the only person to offer a vision of a future endstate for the Korean crisis was MacArthur.⁴⁶

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

We will analyze General Bradley's actions from 25 June to 14 July using the strategic leader competencies presented earlier in this paper. Our analysis begins with his interpersonal skills, proceeds to his technical skills, and concludes with his conceptual skills.

A most striking observation one makes of General Bradley during the early days of the Korean War is that he didn't communicate very effectively or very often. This interpersonal shortcoming becomes most apparent when we analyze his technical and conceptual skills later on in the paper. His reluctance to communicate may stem from the fact that, by his own admission, he wasn't comfortable with writing. From the time he was a cadet at West Point, through his time as an officer, he struggled with the written word. As a general officer he relied exclusively on others to do all his writing.⁴⁷

This may also account for the fact that from 25 June to 14 July, Bradley never once communicated directly with MacArthur. For in 1950, direct communication meant talking via a Teletype. Given Bradley's weakness in writing, the Teletype was not a useful or helpful device. In fact, the Teletype probably inhibited his communication.

Instead of communicating directly with MacArthur himself, Bradley elected to use a middleman, General Collins, whom he labeled "the Executive Agent for the Far East".⁴⁸ While such an arrangement was acceptable during peacetime, it precluded direct and personal communication, and therefore, leadership, between Bradley, the senior military advisor to the president, and General MacArthur, the Theater Commander.

Why Bradley chose not to communicate directly with MacArthur is hard to determine. As has been mentioned, Bradley's aversion to write may account for the lack of spontaneous communication that the teletype mandated, but it doesn't account for Bradley's failure to have someone at least "ghost write" more personal memos to MacArthur. Additionally, it doesn't explain why he chose not to go to Korea himself in July to talk directly with MacArthur. Given the seriousness of the situation that then existed, one would think that Bradley would have preferred to meet with MacArthur himself rather than having Collins represent him. For whatever the reason, the effect was the same, Bradley and MacArthur never communicated directly. Consequently, Bradley was unable to exercise peer leadership. In an ironic sort of way, it was fortunate that at this time of the war, Bradley didn't have to concern himself with consensus building.

Besides needing interpersonal competence, FM 22-103 points out that strategic leaders must also possess technical competence. The most significant of which is the ability to participate effectively in the interagency process of strategy formulation. In this process a strategic leader must successfully articulate a balanced argument for national security interests. Moreover, he must present benefits, costs, and risks involved in the issue at hand in such a manner that

they can survive scrutiny other agencies that have a different agenda and point of view.

Unfortunately, General Bradley demonstrated none of these skills during the first few weeks of the Korean War. When Acheson led a Department of State--Department of Defense interagency working group to prepare the initial recommendations for the president's consideration on 25 June, General Bradley chose not to attend the meeting. Rather, he elected to accompany the Secretary of the Army on a previously scheduled visit of aircraft carriers at Norfolk Virginia. As a result, he missed the opportunity to personally influence the recommendation prior to the meeting with the president that night. Besides failing to attend this critical meeting, Bradley also failed to give guidance or policy recommendations to the officers who represented him. These are certainly not the actions of a person well versed in the interagency process.⁴⁹

During the first meeting with the president on 25 June, only Secretary of State Acheson made any specific recommendations on the crisis in Korea. Bradley said and contributed little of any substance. When asked to speak, he elected to present the irrelevant possibility of an attack on Formosa. Because Bradley was unable to convince the president of the strategic importance of Formosa, the president returned the discussion to the invasion of South Korea. Bradley's

contribution to the meeting from then on amounted to little more than answering questions on the likelihood of Soviet intervention. It is all too clear that during this critical meeting that formulated the policy for the Korean crisis, General Bradley contributed nothing of any value.

Four days later, Bradley again proved himself ineffective in the interagency process. On 30 June the president assembled his advisors to discuss the possible commitment of ground troops to combat in Korea--arguably the most important decision of the entire war. General Bradley, as he did in the other two meetings, said nothing of any account. He merely concurred with the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsement of MacArthur's proposal; mundanely stating that it was necessary to commit ground troops if Korea was not to be over run. What makes his lack of input so astounding is that he, more than any other attendee at the meeting except for Collins, knew how ill prepared the American Army was for combat. Despite this insight, Bradley added nothing to the discussion other than the comment that the decision might necessitate some sort of partial mobilization.

Unlike a competent strategic leader, who is effectively participating in the interagency process, Bradley failed to offer any analysis of JCS recommendation to the president. He failed to explain, for example, the cost of committing all of MacArthur's force to defending Korea. He failed to offer how

the decision might have had long range implications on the administration's policy of containment, or the defense of Europe, which was still the main American interest.

Consequently, the president committed American troops to combat in Korea without fully appreciating the risks and costs involved.

FM 22-103 stresses that conceptual competence is the most important task the strategic leader must possess. It adds that the essence of conceptual competence is the ability to envision the future. Significantly, FM 22-103 points out that while a "staff of strategists may develop and refine the strategy, the strategic leader provides the direction, the concept, the focus". It is the strategic leader who must be able to interpret the vision for those who must execute it. In short, the strategic leader must give the war-fighting CINC a clearly articulated endstate and military objective.

As the senior military advisor to the president this was a responsibility General Bradley could not shirk or delegate.⁵⁰ Sadly, in this critical function, from our perspective today, General Bradley demonstrated rank incompetence. It is clear that he failed to envision an endstate, or a clearly defined military objective in Korea. By failing to provide these, he failed to provide focus or purpose for either the JCS or MacArthur. Without focus and purpose any discussion by the JCS

of resources, risks, or limitations was impossible or meaningless.

As a result of Bradley's conceptual incompetence, MacArthur interpreted the only guidance he received, namely, the United Nations resolution of 27 June. From this vague political statement, MacArthur formulated a campaign plan--a vision and endstate--that would ultimately lead to the Inchon landing and, eventually, to the crossing of the 38th parallel. To this Bradley offered no insight or assessment. He merely agreed.

Bradley's conceptual failings forced General Collins, in responding to MacArthur's requirements, to strip the Army to the bone. It reduced the General Reserve to almost nothing, and tore the Army's training infrastructure to shreds. It would take years to recover from this action.

CONCLUSION

By today's standards, specifically those of FM 22-103, General Bradley was an incompetent strategic leader, at least during the early weeks of the Korean War. From our frame of reference, the evidence suggests that he demonstrated some degree of interpersonal, technical, and conceptual failings.

In terms of interpersonal competencies, there is little doubt that he failed to communicate effectively with General MacArthur. This is apparent by the fact that he simply didn't

communicate directly at all with General MacArthur. By extension it is hard to conclude that Bradley dealt with MacArthur as a peer when he made no attempt to personally dialogue with him.

As to technical competence, General Bradley seems to have had no understanding of the interagency process of strategy formulation. Consequently, during the first few weeks of the war Bradley seems oddly out of place in formulating strategy. He seems to have preferred to agree to what others proposed or said. He never seemed able to add anything of substance to the discussion himself.

All of these failings, however, seem almost inconsequential when compared to his conceptual incompetence. It is in this arena where we see Bradley as most inept. First, he never offered an idea or concept. Second, he seemed incapable of analyzing other's proposals as well, but most notably MacArthur's. One can only assume, therefore, that he lacked the ability to conceptualize at all. As such, he seems to have been a leader incapable of seeing anything beyond the present. If this is correct, it is no wonder that he would say, nearly a year after the war began, that the war in Korea, "was the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy"⁵¹. Sadly, had he been able to say this in June of 1950, rather than in the spring of 1951, we might be able to say he

was a competent strategic leader. Instead we can only say that Bradley's leadership, at least during the early days of the Korean War is a good example of how not to lead at the strategic level.

How can it be that a leader with as much experience in combat command at theater level, as General Bradley, could be so incompetent at the strategic level? Surely, the skills couldn't be that different? Or could they?

During his time in World War Two, Bradley's frame of reference was limited to a single theater. He didn't have to consider the implications of actions within the European Theater on other theaters of war. Arguably, his focus was tactical and operational rather than strategic.

After the war, Bradley led the Veterans Administration (VA) for two and one half years. Bradley is very frank in his autobiography that he was not prepared for the job, and that he had to rely on others' experience to get him through its many challenges. Still, the position exposed Bradley to Washington politics, and to the challenges of administering a large organization. While this was a very responsible and difficult position, it did not concern itself with global or strategic issues.⁵²

From the VA Bradley became the Army Chief of Staff in February 1948, taking over from General Eisenhower. In this

position, he assumed a strategic responsibility for the first time in his career. Again, by his own admission it was a period of great personal challenge. For one thing, his tenure took place concurrent with the establishment of the Department of Defense, and the post-World War Two reorganization of the Army, and the start of the Cold War. During this time Bradley helped develop America's early containment strategy. In particular, he had direct responsibility for the review of war planning for the Far East, to include the analysis of defending Korea. This gave Bradley his first legitimate global view, and an insight into the interagency nature of strategy formulation. Given that this was Bradley's first strategic leadership position, it was very important and, no doubt, very influential in preparing him for his next job as the CJCS. Unfortunately, Bradley held the position for less than eighteen months.⁵³

As he had done when he became the CSA, Bradley replaced Eisenhower, this time though as the CJCS. He held the position for less than a year when the Korean War began in June 1950. During this all too brief period of time he helped refine the "Europe First" concept that constituted America's military strategy of containment in late 1949. He also visited Japan on the eve of the Korean War, gaining a first hand perspective of MacArthur views on Asia. Unfortunately, time didn't let him grow in his job as the Chairman.⁵⁴

In short, from the time he became the CSA through his time as the CJCS, Bradley had a mere three years to learn the skills of strategic leadership when the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel in June 1950. The school of hard knocks would be his training ground. And, as we have seen, the school of hard knocks is not the kindest teacher. It does not allow for mistakes or inexperience. It is certainly lamentable to be in a position where one has to give advice while one is learning the job. Such, however, was General Bradley's fate. Perhaps with the advent of manuals such as FM 22-103, as well as an officer professional development program to complement this manual, future leaders will have learned the fundamental skills of strategic leadership before they have to give the president, or other senior leaders advise during crisis situations. Word count: 7055

ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Department of the Army, Strategic Leadership (draft), Field Manual (FM) 22-103, as reprinted in Leading and Managing in the Strategic Arena: A Reference Text 1996-1997 (Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 1996), 101. Currently FM 22-103 is in limbo as the Center for Army Leadership revises the Army's basic leadership manual FM 22-100 Military Leadership.

² Ibid, 102-104.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 100-102.

⁷ Ibid, 96-100.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David Jablonsky, "Cold War Chronology, 1945-1950," in Core Curriculum, Course 2: War, National Policy & Strategy (Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 1997), 90-93.

¹³ Ernest R. May, American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68 (Boston, Bedford Books, 1993), 1-3.

¹⁴ D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur: Triumph and Disaster 1945-1964 (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 402-404.

¹⁵ May, 1-3.

¹⁶ May, *ibid*; Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, A General's Life (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1983), 474, 481-483, 487-489, 500-518. Bradley makes the point that Eisenhower left him an Army that was in bad shape.

¹⁷ Bradley, *ibid*.

¹⁸ Bradley, *ibid*.

¹⁹ James, 402-404; James F. Schnable, United States Army in the Korean War, Policy and Direction: The First Year (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1973), 41-60; Bradley, 481-483; Clay Blair, The Forgotten War: America in Korea 1950-1953 (New York, Times Books, 1987), 12-18; Roy K. Flint, "The Tragic Flaw: MacArthur, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Korean War," Duke University, 1976, 29-42.

²⁰ Bradley, 487-490.

²¹ Bradley, 523-531.

²² Blair, 58-61; Flint, 56. There is contention on how much the CIA knew. As Flint points out, the exact amount of

information they knew was academic: The United States had no plans to defend Korea.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Blair, 67-68, 71-73; Glenn D. Paige, The Korea Decision (New York, Collier Macmillan, 125-141; Flint, 73. Flint asserts that the leaders felt that something had to be done even if Korea were lost.

²⁵ Flint, 61.

²⁶ Paige, 125-141.

²⁷ Flint, 65, Flint also points out that Bradley gave his opinion without a strategic estimate.

²⁸ Flint, *ibid.*

²⁹ Flint, 72

³⁰ Paige, 125-141. One gets the impression that the idea was that Korea was as good a place as anywhere else to fight communism. Bradley doesn't expand on his comment in his autobiography.

³¹ Flint, 65, 72.

³² J. Lawton Collins, War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea (Boston, Houghton Mufflin Company, 1969), 19-24; James 340-341.

³³ James, 340-341.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Blair, 82-83.

³⁶ Blair, 82-86, Paige, 257.

³⁷ Blair, 101-104.

³⁸ Collins, 77-85; Blair, 119-125; James, 441-444. James points out that MacArthur kept increasing his requirements after giving the JCS the impression that his own forces in Japan would be sufficient to stop the invasion.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Flint, 114-121, 154-156; James, 442-443; Collins, 79-85; Blair, 121, 123-127.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Both Flint and Blair make the point that the Army gutted itself to meet MacArthur's needs.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ James, 427; Flint, 101-102.

⁴⁷ Clay Blair who helped Bradley write his "autobiography" notes that Bradley's personal correspondence was pedestrian at best, adding that Bradley's attempts to write his autobiography

were an incoherent sprawl; see Collaborator's Forward in Bradley, A General's Life.

⁴⁸ Flint, 154.

⁴⁹ There are no references that indicate that Bradley gave Collins or anyone else any guidance for the 25 June interagency meeting.

⁵⁰ David McCullough, Truman (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1992), 794. Although not the specified advisor that the CJCS is today, Truman trusted and liked Bradley and came to rely on his advice very much.

⁵¹ Collins as quoted in War in Peacetime, p.290

⁵² Bradley, 447-462.

⁵³ Ibid, 470-505.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 506-519.

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