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Bridge of Sighs

NO-MAN'S LAND. Korea was squeezed in the middle.

Koreans were joining the ranks of World War II's disillusioned peoples. If the war was fought to bring the benefits of democratic self-government to dictator-ridden countries, why, Koreans demanded, weren't they getting those benefits?

Korea hadn't really been misruled by Japan. As Asiatic colonial governments go, the Japanese regime in Korea had been enlightened comparable to U.S. rule of the Philippines, rather than British rule of India. Nevertheless, Koreans had wanted independence.

Through decades of Japanese control, Korean patriots had dreamed of eventual freedom as a heaven for some hereafter. VJ-Day seemed to bring that hereafter into the present.

Dashed Hopes. The Japs were thrown out. The Yank and Russian liberators marched in. But the dreamed-of heaven began to look more and more like purgatory—if not a worse place. As the Red Army and its side-kicks, the Chinese Communists, tightened their grip on Manchuria, the strategic importance of the Korean peninsula, sticking down from Manchuria toward the southern end of the Japanese islands, forced Korea into the middle of the conflict between Russian and American aims. The Korean people's hopes for unity and independence under Allied control were pushed to the background.

The Russians occupied all Korea north of the 38th parallel. The Yanks occupied the southern part and administered it under Gen. MacArthur's government of Japan. Thus Korea had come to resemble a narrow bridge on which Yanks and Russians, crossing from opposite sides, had got stuck in the middle—at the 38th parallel. Since neither the Yanks nor the Reds

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would retreat, the iron curtain at the 38th parallel made it a bridge of sighs for Koreans.

Resentment. Koreans didn't want their country cut in two. It had been an economic, cultural, and political unit under the Japs. The North mined coal the South needed. The South grew food the North needed. Was the chief effect on Korea of the war for liberation to be loss of unity? Were Yank and Russian liberators to be worse than Japanese oppressors?

Korean complaints that liberation was meaningless without unity and independence won Gen. MacArthur's sympathy. Yet he couldn't conscientiously order his Yanks out of southern Korea as long as the Russians held the North. Pulling out the Yanks would just be an invitation to the Reds to communize all Korea.

Already they were painting the North Red—obviously the reason for the iron curtain. From behind it trickled reports of the same sort of thing that was going on behind that other iron curtain in Central Europe and the Balkans. The Red Army was putting local Reds in power, exterminating opposition.

Prospects of negotiating a Russian withdrawal from northern Korea were about as bright as prospects of negotiating the same thing in Rumania or Bulgaria. MacArthur faced the same uncompromising Red attitude in Korea as Byrnes faced in Paris.

The Red Army would leave Korea when it felt like it. And it would feel like it when northern Korea, at least, was so safely Red that even the Red Army couldn't paint it much Redder.

Bad Outlook. Thus, whichever way they looked at their political future, Koreans saw little hope for the unity and independence they'd dreamed would follow Japan's defeat. Even in the Yank-ruled South, Korean Communists—a minority, but fanatical and well-heeled with cash—were playing standard Communist rule-or-ruin politics. Some of their opponents

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