INTRODUCTION

SCOPE OF THE COVERAGE

This volume presents documents on United States policy toward Korea and on United States—Republic of Korea relations during the years 1952–1954. During the first year and a half of this period, the continuation of the Korean war provides the focus. Although the fighting in Korea was stalemated during the 19 months until the armistice, casualties continued while the United Nations Command and the Communist side met at Panmunjom to attempt to reach a military armistice. These negotiations were supposed to preclude political considerations, but by the nature of the issues at stake and the ideology of the cold war, they became pre-eminently political. The editors have chosen to emphasize the formulation by the Executive Branch of the basic policy decisions raised by these political issues. Thus, deliberations on the policy of voluntary repatriation of prisoners of war, on the role of the Soviet Union in any future postarmistice conference on Korea, and on the question of a political settlement on the Korean peninsula loom large in this volume. Conversely, the technical side of the armistice which was still unresolved at the beginning of 1952 is given less space.

Efforts to achieve peace in Korea were not limited to the truce tent at Panmunjom and the editors have included documentation on diplomatic approaches via the Indian Government to the People’s Republic of China, an initiative to the Soviet Union, and a serious attempt in late 1952 by the United Nations General Assembly to produce a formula capable of ending the fighting. A corollary to both the Panmunjom negotiations and the diplomatic initiatives beyond the truce tent was the question of what the United States should do in the event it was unable to attain an acceptable peace in Korea. Contingency planning which had atomic war as an option was ultimately discussed and accepted by the National Security Council in 1953. This decision has been given the most complete treatment possible.

Armistice did come to Korea in July 1953. The basic story of this success, except for the question of the Republic of Korea’s adherence, is generally known. This volume serves to fill out the details.

As for the bilateral relationship between the Republic of Korea and the United States, the editors have sought to illuminate the
principal issues. In May and June 1952, when President Syngman Rhee was involved in a political and constitutional struggle with opponents in the National Assembly, the United States attempted with minimal success to dissuade the Korean President from using extralegal means to achieve his ends and even considered plans for United Nations Command intervention into South Korean affairs. This political crisis was resolved by Rhee's victory over his opponents in the legislative branch. The plan for intervention was shelved. When it became obvious in June 1953, after President Rhee released the nonrepatriate Korean prisoners of war, that the opposition of the Rhee government was the main obstacle to the armistice, the United States again considered intervention. This time it was rejected in favor of negotiations with Rhee to obtain his promise not to disrupt the armistice. The mission of Assistant Secretary of State Walter Robertson, which accomplished this task and paved the way for signature of the armistice, and Secretary John Foster Dulles' trip to Seoul in August 1953, which completed Robertson's work, were both part of this campaign. The decision to negotiate with Rhee rather than to attempt to replace him with a more amenable South Korean leadership and the evolution of these negotiations are naturally given extensive coverage.

The Korean armistice brought to the fore the remaining bilateral issues between the United States and the Republic of Korea which were generally resolved during the next year and a half. These questions are treated in less detail than the issues of war and peace. They include the final details for a Mutual Defense Treaty, economic reconstruction, military aid, redeployment of United States forces from Korea and expansion of South Korean armed forces. Also part of this bilateral list was the nagging question of currency advances from the Republic of Korea to the United States forces there. This was an issue which plagued both countries virtually throughout the 3-year period covered in this volume. The editors attempted to document this problem only when it reached the highest level of consideration or brought on a crisis. They followed the same approach with a multilateral issue, the question of reimbursement of the United States for costs incurred by nations participating in the United Nations effort in Korea.

The successful conclusion of the armistice also revived the issue of a political settlement in the Korean peninsula. The editors attempted merely to highlight the preliminary political negotiations at Panmunjom, which ended unsuccessfully in December 1953. Material on the problem posed by President Rhee's threat of unilateral action against the North, in view of the failure of the United States and the Communist side to reach a political settlement for Korea, forms a crucial segment of the compilation. Vice President
Richard Nixon’s visit to Seoul in November 1953 during which he received assurances from Rhee that he would not take unilateral military action without first consulting the United States is dealt with in as much detail as the records provide. Contingency planning similar to that considered in June and July 1953 was again discussed and approved by the National Security Council in the event that Rhee should attempt such action.

In early 1954 a shift of serious consideration of the Korean question from Panmunjom to international conferences in Europe requires that the reader use other Foreign Relations volumes in conjunction with this one. The records of the Berlin Conference of January and February 1954, in which the decision to call a conference of Korean belligerents in Geneva was agreed upon, may be found in volume VII. Documents on the Korean phase of the Geneva Conference, including United States efforts to persuade the Republic of Korea to attend, are contained in volume XVI, an essential companion to this volume.

In this volume the editors have attempted to account for major policy decisions on Korea during 1952–1954, to include as much political reporting as possible from United States Missions which they believe influenced these decisions, and finally to document as fully as they are able the interaction of United States policy with that of other nations with interests in Korea. Given the limitations of space, the task has required that the editors make value judgments as to the relative importance of issues as well as individual documents.