

## 'War on the 38th parallel', from Le Monde (26 June 1950)

**Caption:** On 27 June 1950, following the invasion of South Korea by the North Korean Army, the French daily newspaper Le Monde condemns both the inconsistency of US policy in the Far East and the Communist policy of aggression encouraged by the Soviet Union.

**Source:** Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 27.06.1950, n° 1685; 7e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La guerre sur le 38e parallèle", p. 1.

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## War on the 38th parallel

It may be too late to save South Korea: the unfortunate 'Democratic' Republic of Seoul will, at all events, have been the victim — to put it bluntly — of not only an act of Communist aggression encouraged by the Soviet Union but also the inconsistency and hesitancy of US policy in the Far East.

Korea's fate was, in reality, determined two years ago during secret meetings at the Pentagon, the United States' military headquarters. Around July 1948, the US National Security Council took a decision of vital importance: to evacuate the south of Korea where US troops, at their peak, numbered 40 000 men. This decision was motivated by the fact that, from a strategic point of view, the presence of a US base in South Korea had seemed to military experts to be of doubtful value in the event of a war against the USSR.

In the final days of December 1948, therefore, US troops evacuated Seoul and the bases that they were occupying south of the 38th parallel. They left behind only a military mission.

The misfortune is that the international community could have imagined, like the Americans, that the regime in South Korea, left to face the Communist menace from the North alone — a threat which is even more dangerous given that the North holds the country's principal economic wealth, — could, with US aid limited to weapons and dollars, face up to the strong regime set up in Pyongyang by the Russians before their own evacuation, which took place before that of the US troops.

However, once again the facts show — as if such a demonstration were needed after the tragedy in China — that US weapons and dollars are not sufficient to stand in the way of the Communist advance through Asia. Moreover, the international community was misled when it believed, on the strength of optimistic assurances, in the solidity of the government presided over by Mr Syngman Rhee. Its weakness lies in one major fact: that the splitting of Korea into two parts has, since 1945, been a deep wound for the Korean people. The North's propaganda in favour of national unification has never ceased to have a profound effect in the South. Furthermore, in an atmosphere of political anarchy, and divided into numerous factions, the South Korean Government could survive only through relying on a strong police force, whose role in the State made South Korea a country that was far from being 'democratic' and a legitimate champion of freedom.

These considerations will clearly not be able to appease international opinion, nor that of the French in particular. French support for the United Nations Resolution on this matter is unconditional.

However, has the United States' prestige as well as that of the United Nations not become involved in a rather unwise manner? US policy wavered for too long between realism — which demanded military evacuation of South Korea at the end of 1948 — and political illusions, which prolonged the resistance of a regime too weak to face alone the threat of the North. It is to be feared that the events of the next few days will come to show that the match was lost in advance and that belated US assistance will come too late. One may also fear that the same events will shortly recur in Formosa ...

Happily, it is hardly likely that the Korean crisis will degenerate into an international conflict, with the United States itself endeavouring, it seems, to contain the danger. Nevertheless, it will certainly have considerable ramifications in Asia and a profound influence upon US policy in this part of the world. The tragedy will, at least, not have been in vain if it makes the United States finally confront the realities of the Asian situation, and if, in particular, it puts an end to their hesitations and prevarications in South-East Asia.