



Unequal Partners in Peace and War: The Republic of Korea and the United States, 1948-1953

Jongsuk Chay

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The United States and the Republic of Korea have managed to forge a strong working relationship both in wartime and in peacetime, despite an inequality in power between them, through fulfillment of their respective responsibilities. Chay explores how Korean and American actions and inaction affected relations between the two and within the international context of the Korean War. He focuses on how and why war might have been avoided or resolved differently as a result of poor choices and missed opportunities. Using Korean sources, as well as Chinese and Russian materials, this study provides valuable new insights into the relationship between these two unequal powers.

The course of the Korean War swung like a pendulum powered by two outside interventions: that of the United States, made largely due to the symbolic value of Korea; and that of China, an action taken mainly for security reasons. Chay identifies key actions, including the division of Korea along the 38th Parallel, the 1949 troop withdrawal, and the failure to build an adequate military and economic deterrent in the South, as events that, had they not occurred, might have influenced the final outcome of the conflict. Restraint on the part of the United States and China and the role of the Korean peninsula as a geographic buffer zone ultimately prevented either side from gaining control of the entire peninsula, resulting in a stalemate. While issues of relative strength and weakness hindered U.S.-Korean cooperation after the end of the Second World War, once war came to the region the two powers built a successful partnership that addressed the national interests of both parties.

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