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# Cyr: Strong leaders define power realities of Korea

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## FULL TEXT

History encourages persistence, despite setbacks, and the Korean Peninsula is an especially important example. The summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korea leader Kim Jong-un underscores this. The meeting has been primarily symbolic, but may lead to diplomatic relations, at least.

Regarding modern Korea history, two leaders stand out for strong defining roles —President Harry Truman of the U.S. and Premier Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union. On June 25, 1950, North Korea launched a surprise military invasion of South Korea.

Truman reacted quickly, deciding to support the United Nations military effort to oppose the invasion. For almost three years, the U.S. led the coalition that saved South Korea.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, state archives became available. They confirm Stalin was a prime mover of the invasion.

The Korean War was enormously costly. Along with the communist victory in China, the war transformed the Cold War from a Europe-focused to global conflict.

President Dwight Eisenhower succeeded Truman and achieved the armistice ending the war. He also maintained sustained practical policy focus on South Korea, and initiated detailed comprehensive development work

Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, previously president of General Motors Co., received a broad mandate. Peter Drucker had written a book critical of GM management, which irritated other executives but impressed Wilson, who recruited Drucker to work on education.

The success of South Korea today reflects that strong American helping hand. Eisenhower's initiative highlights not only the costs of war but also the difficulty of handling life after war, and the need for comprehensive, thorough planning.

South Korea has repaid this vital support in various ways. In 2001, President Kim Dae-jung made a point of being among the first heads of government to visit newly inaugurated President George W. Bush.

Throughout the long costly Vietnam War, South Korea maintained approximately 50,000 troops in that country to fight beside the South Vietnamese and American forces, plus contingents from Australia and New Zealand.

The South Korean troops were far from home in Southeast Asia because of a very powerful public as well as

government commitment to the American alliance. This in turn provides a firm foundation for long-term diplomatic cooperation and more informal but comprehensive economic, educational and technical interchange. The human dimension is especially important in South Korea-U.S. relations.

The historical background to current stable representative government in South Korea is a story of vital importance to Americans as well as Koreans. Gen. Park Chung-hee was part of a military coup that seized control of the country in 1961. He solidified personal control of the government, and ruled with an iron fist. In 1979, his intelligence chief assassinated him.

Park's harsh leadership had generated increasingly strong if uncertain currents of opposition. Two more generals, Chun Doo Hwan and Roe Tae Woo, succeeded him as president, but growing pressure for democracy proved unstoppable.

The capstone of democratic transition was the 1998 election of President Kim Dae-jung. Earlier, the Park dictatorship had imprisoned him. On another occasion, South Korea agents kidnapped him and were planning to kill him. U.S. CIA official Donald Gregg saved his life.

Kim Dae-jung, with Eisenhower and Truman and many other Koreans and Americans, played a vital role in the evolution of South Korea. Current Presidents Trump and Moon Jae-in of South Korea have the opportunity to build on this remarkable legacy.

Meanwhile, Stalin's world is gone. Kim Jong-un realizes that.

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Credit: Arthur I. Cyr

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	Cold War; Presidents; Leadership
<b>Location:</b>	Australia Europe South Korea Southeast Asia New Zealand North Korea United States–US Union of Soviet Socialist Republics–USSR Vietnam Korean Peninsula China
<b>People:</b>	Chun Doo Hwan Trump, Donald J Bush, George W Drucker, Peter F Kim Jong Un Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich (1879-1953) Wilson, Charles Moon Jae-in Truman, Harry S (1884-1972)
<b>Company / organization:</b>	Name: United Nations–UN; NAICS: 928120; Name: Central Intelligence Agency–CIA; NAICS: 928110, 928120; Name: Carthage College; NAICS: 611310; Name: General Motors Corp; NAICS: 333415, 336111, 336390
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