

HARRY S. TRUMAN: A STUDY OF THE RHETORIC
OF LIMITED COMMITMENT

by

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HARRY S. TRUMAN. A STUDY OF THE RHETORIC
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CHAPTER I

NATURE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

There can be little doubt about the strategic importance of Harry S. Truman's place in history. During the years that he occupied the White House, from 1945 to 1953, the times were such that he was required to make more critical decisions than perhaps any of his predecessors. Not even President Roosevelt faced the awesome likelihood, as did Truman, of triggering with a single utterance, a nuclear holocaust. As Louis W. Koenig contended, in his book The Truman Administration, "the difficulties with which Harry S. Truman was beset and hedged about when and just after he succeeded to the presidency are not likely ever to be overestimated, and to overstate them would be next to impossible."¹

One such difficult decision grew out of the question in 1950 of providing support for South Korea (Republic of Korea) in its efforts to counter an expansionist move by the Communists. When the news of Truman's decision to support South Korea became public, the American people responded with an enthusiastic endorsement of the President's action. In the words of James Reston of the New York Times: "The decision to meet the Communist challenge in Korea has produced a transformation in the spirit of the United States Government . . . There have

been some differences in the last seventy-two hours over how to react to the Communist invasion, but . . . these differences have apparently been swept away by the general conviction that the dangers of inaction were greater than the bold action taken by the President."² The tide of favorable sentiment for the President was not confined just to Washington. From throughout the country, letters and telegrams poured in to the White House, running ten-to-one in favor of the President's decision. Even Thomas Dewey, Truman's 1948 opponent, wired a message stating: "I wholeheartedly agree with and support the difficult decision you have made."³

Unfortunately for President Truman, his overwhelming political and public support proved short-lived. The decision to back the South Koreans brought Truman out of an eighteen-month popularity decline in June only to begin another decline shortly thereafter. In fact, when the public opinion polls are matched with the dates of Truman's first two national addresses (July 19 and September 1), there is little evidence that the speeches resulted in any significant opinion shift in Truman's direction. In both of his two addresses, Truman spent considerable effort demonstrating that America was forced by the Communist aggression to respond positively, as well as alluding to a world-wide Communist threat. The foreshadowing of Truman's failure to hold the support of the American people is vividly expressed in the following statement by Senator Wiley.

I speak now about the world situation as it confronts us today. The newspapers say there is a feeling of relief in Washington now that the bickering and indecision has disappeared and that we are rallying to the President's support. I am not sure that that feeling now exists to the extent it did immediately after the President sent American forces to Korea. I am sure that in the hinterland people are thinking, and thinking and thinking about where we are going.⁴

Purpose of the Study

Since Truman was unable to hold the support of the American people so overwhelmingly given initially, the primary focus of this study will be to determine the relationship between Truman, his rhetoric, the nature of the war, and Truman's decline in popularity following the outset of the war. The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) to determine the nature of Truman's rhetorical defense of American intervention in the Korean Conflict, i.e., the arguments for which he sought support, the appeals he used, and the target audiences he tried to reach and influence; (2) to describe and interpret the effects of his rhetoric by correlating his arguments or claims with his shifts in popularity and with his subsequent rhetorical tactics; and (3) to assess Truman's rhetoric in light of the choices available to him, and his perception of the nature of the situation he faced and the audiences he addressed. The scope of this investigation is limited to an intensive concern with two speeches, both of which were addressed to the nation, both about the conflict in Korea, and both representative of Truman's view of his role as a tough-minded negotiator with the Russians. Although Truman made numerous public statements during the period being studied (June 25 - November 30, 1950), he delivered only two major addresses to the nation on the matter of Korea. Since these two addresses set the stage, rhetorically, between Truman and his audiences and America and other nations, and obviously represent the purest form of thought-out response by President Truman, analysis will be confined to these speeches.

Reasons for the Study

The importance of Truman's place in history seems to be increasing with the passage of time. Although Truman's popularity from 1945 to July 1950 vacillated from a high of eighty-seven percent to a low of thirty-two percent, he maintained an average of approximately forty-five percent. From a low for the year 1950 of thirty-seven percent in June, Truman's popularity increased to forty-six percent in July.⁵ It should be pointed out that the percentage of public support expressed here is based on the opinion of the public concerning the President's overall handling of his job. A survey conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion on June 27, showed eighty-one percent of the people favored the President's decision on Korea and thirteen percent disapproved of the decision. Two months later on August 18, a similar survey showed sixty-five percent favored the President's decision while twenty percent did not.⁶

The expression of public confidence given to the President's overall handling of his job reached a high of forty-six percent in July. In the same month, however, public support began a decline, and eventually reached twenty-six percent by February, 1951. From this all time low, Truman's overall popularity, according to the Gallup Poll, never rose higher than thirty-one percent while he remained in office.⁷ It seems clear that Truman's decline in popular support was tied inextricably to the Korean Conflict and the posture he assumed toward it. Furthermore, Truman was unable to hold the willing support of the American people, nor was he able to revive it once lost.

The primary objective of this study is to produce a set of reasoned explanations about Truman's seeming rhetorical failure, if indeed it can

be properly called that. There may be something about the American experience that makes historical successes out of rhetorical failures and vice versa. In any event, this study seeks an accounting and an explanation of Truman's attempts to influence the nation and the world during those tense months in 1950 when Russia and the United States were putting the persuasive "moves" on one another.

Materials

Information for this study has been drawn mainly from the Watson Library, University of Kansas, and the holdings of the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. Of particular value in understanding Truman's perception of himself, of his role as the President, and of the Russians are his two volumes of memoirs, his earlier book Mr. Citizen, his daughter's book Harry S. Truman, and William Hillman's book Mr. President. The texts of Truman's two addresses were obtained in verbatim form from the Public Papers of the Presidents - Harry S. Truman - 1950, published by the United States Government Printing Office.

Materials about Truman are plentiful and possibly run into the thousands. These include book-length scholarly studies such as The Crucial Decade, The Truman Presidency, and The Politics of Loyalty. There are like-wise several dozen unpublished theses and dissertations about Truman's life, career, administration, and political encounters. Only a few focus on his rhetoric, notably Michael S. Twedt's doctoral dissertation, "The War Rhetoric of Harry S Truman During the Korean Conflict."⁸ None of these, however, are concerned primarily with the relationship between Truman's Korean rhetoric and his decline in public support. A full listing of relevant sources appears in the Bibliography.

Overview of Chapters

The purpose of Chapter II will be to analyze the development of Truman as a rhetorical agent. Of primary concern will be Truman's view of himself, his view of his fellow man and the world about him, and his effectiveness in adjusting other people to his ideas.

The third chapter will examine the ordinal relationship of events leading up to the invasion, the decision-making process, and the nature of the rhetorical situation in which Truman found himself.

An analysis of the dynamic process of adjustment will be the focus of Chapter IV. This chapter will consist of a systematic treatment of the two speeches in an attempt to determine what Truman was trying to do in his addresses, how he went about it, the bases underlying his appeals, and a determination of the feasibility of his strategy.

The final chapter will recapitulate the salient points of the study and the conclusions they suggest. The conclusions, however, will attempt to look beyond the immediate implications suggested and view the rhetoric of any President of the United States in terms of any future limited war situation.

Footnotes

¹Louis W. Koenig, ed., The Truman Administration (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 1.

²quoted in Eric F. Goldman, The Crucial Decade (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 157.

³Ibid., p. 158.

⁴Ronald J. Caridi, The Korean War and American Politics (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 53.

⁵Papers on Gallup Poll, American Institute of Public Opinion, March 14, 1951, Truman Library.

⁶Gallup Poll, October 4, 1950, Truman Library

⁷Gallup Poll, March 14, 1951, Truman Library.

⁸Michael S. Twedt, "The War Rhetoric of Harry S. Truman During the Korean Conflict," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1970).

CHAPTER II

TRUMAN'S DEVELOPMENT AS A RHETORICAL AGENT

Introduction

Just as the invasion of South Korea consisted of and was brought about by a finite number of relationships subsumed by the whole but requiring, in some cases, identification and separate handling by the rhetorician, of equal importance in the study of rhetoric, is the understanding of the man who suddenly found himself faced with the decision of whether to adjust himself to the situation, adjust the situation to himself, or both. Truman brought to the Korean crisis an unusual and varied background of interests, experiences, and lived wisdom, the totality of which constituted what can be called his acquired ethos. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine those elements in the development of Truman's ethos that influenced his view of himself as a man of knowledge, energy, mission, determination, and action.

Early Life

In early 1882, John Truman purchased for his bride Martha, a tiny frame house in Lamar, Missouri. Although the house was small, there was a yard and a big barn in the back that John planned to use in his mule-trading business. Martha, accustomed to better living, accepted her immediate plight and looked toward the brighter hopes of the future.

Martha delivered a stillborn child in 1883, an event which

depressed her for several months to follow, but she was soon expecting again. On May 8, 1884, she gave birth to a son who was destined to become the thirty-third President of the United States. His name was intended to be Harrison Shippe Truman, but Harrison was shortened to Harry and no agreement could be reached concerning his middle name, so his name was recorded as simply Harry S. Truman.¹

Mule-trading was not good for the Trumans in Lamar, and when Harry was a year old his family moved to Harrisonville, south of Kansas City, only to find mule-trading poor there, too. At the age of three, Harry and his family moved to Grandview, Missouri to live with his grandparents.

In 1890, after Harry's father had collected his part of Anderson Truman's small estate, the Trumans were moving again--this time to Independence, Missouri, a town of 6,000 people.

Shortly before Harry started to school, his mother discovered that he was unable to read small print or recognize objects close up. Upon examination by an oculist in Kansas City, it was discovered that he was suffering from severe hyperopia and would have to wear extremely thick-lensed glasses. Harry was somewhat of an accident-prone child. And with having to wear glasses constantly, he turned away from the usual rough-and-tumble kids' games to less physical activities. He frequented the Independence Library and read everything from novels to encyclopedias. By the time he was twelve, he had finished his second reading of the Bible.

Young Harry soon found another activity to his liking--playing the piano. After taking lessons initially from his mother at home, he eventually progressed to taking lessons from a Kansas City teacher

Twice a week Harry went for lessons, rising at 5:00 A.M. in order to get in two hours of practice before school. He continued his lessons until, at age fifteen, he suddenly quit. From comments made in later years, he apparently felt he had reached or was near his maximum potential, which he felt was not good enough to become a musician.

In the summer of 1898, at the age of fourteen, Harry landed his first job. For three dollars a week, he mopped the floor, swept the sidewalk, etc., at Clinton's Drug Store. This was his first acquaintance with the realities of the adult world and he was quite shocked to find some of the town's leading churchgoers stopping by each morning for a drink of liquor that Clinton kept behind the prescription case.

In Independence, Harry's father found success in the grain business and subsequently acquired political favor as well. At the 1900 Democratic National Convention in Kansas City, Harry's father sat in a special box with some prominent people including a member of the local political machine led by Jim Pendergast. With his father's help, Harry became a convention page.² Later, recalling his first political convention, Truman said, "I remember that there were seventeen thousand people in the old convention hall when William Jennings Bryan spoke. His appeal that day was like nothing I have ever heard. He had a bell-like voice that carried well and he knew how to use it."³

The following year, in 1901, Harry graduated from high school. This was a real mark of achievement since in those days few boys stayed in school. Harry was considered a good student, though not the best in class. According to Miss Tillie Brown, his high school English teacher, Harry wasn't as brilliant as Charlie Ross, but he was "a determined and

hard worker."⁴ Charlie Ross was the class valedictorian.

In summary, although the childhood of Harry Truman was crowded with dogs and cats, pigeons, and pet pigs, his mother insisted that room be made for books and music. Harry's father had only the schooling available around Grandview, but his mother had attended a Baptist Female College in Livingston, Missouri. In looking at Harry Truman's early years, it is obvious that much of his perception of things and people was significantly influenced by his mother, his study of books, his poor eyesight, and his piano playing.⁵

After high school, Harry wanted to attend West Point, and he and Fielding Houchens, a friend, began the preparations under the tutelage of Miss Maggie Phelps, a high school teacher. After only a short period, however, Harry had his eyes examined at an Army recruiting station in Kansas City and found to his dismay that he could not meet West Point standards. Even had he qualified, Harry could not have gone to West Point because shortly after he received his high school diploma, his father experienced serious financial setbacks that were to plague the family for years to come.

In early 1901, Harry's father was worth more than \$30,000; however, by the fall of 1901, his money was so tied up that Harry had to get a job to help keep his brother Vivian and sister Mary Jane in school.⁶ Harry's job--his first real job--was as a timekeeper for the L. J. Smith Construction Company, where he worked six days a week and earned thirty-five dollars a month and board. At the time, Smith was contractor in charge of laying local trackage for the Santa Fe Railroad. Twice a day, Harry pumped a handcar between Smith's three camps to fill out the time tickets of 400 gandy dancers, or railroad hobos. His job put him into

the company of rougher-talking men than he had ever experienced before. Although Harry may have appeared somewhat out of place in the midst of these roughnecks, when his contract ended in 1902, the foreman said, "Harry's all right. He's all right from his navel out in every direction."⁷ Soon after, Harry took a job in the mail room of the Kansas City Star, which paid seven dollars a week.

Meanwhile, things had gone from bad to worse for Harry's father. He bought forty acres of worthless land in Oregon County, Missouri, sight unseen. Finances forced him to sell the family house and buy a cheaper one. Not long afterward, he had to sell the 160-acre farm the family had inherited from Solomon Young, that had been in the family for more than fifty years. Then suddenly he lost everything he had and went completely broke. He never recovered from the shock of his loss, and shortly thereafter took a job as night watchman with an elevator company in Kansas City. His sons went to work with the National Bank of Commerce.

Working in the caged section of the bank's basement, Harry soon found the work boring and dull. Ambitious and eager but without prospects, Harry quit the bank in 1904 and went to work as a bookkeeper for the Union National Bank. At this point, Truman's circumstances began to change quickly. Harry's father traded his Kansas City house for a down payment on an 80-acre farm near Clinton, and for the first time in his life, Harry found he was on his own.

The next year, Harry began his military career. On Flag Day, he enlisted in a sixty-man Missouri National Guard unit and served two three-year hitches. Once a week, Private Truman paid a quarter to drill in the armory and soon became number two man on a three-inch light gun team. He became proficient in handling horses and even learned a little

about fencing and jujitsu. Though only twenty-one years old, he was already remarkably well-rounded and experienced in human affairs.

The year 1905 also brought another tragic event in the life of Harry's father. This time a flood washed away the entire corn crop on his Clinton farm. With virtually no other alternative, Harry's father and mother moved back to the farm in Grandview to live with Harry's widowed grandmother.

When Harry was twenty-two, circumstances on the farm were such that Harry's father asked him to give up his job at the bank and help manage the Young farm. Since he never disobeyed his parents, Harry quit his job and obediently returned to Grandview. For more than ten years, he routinely got up at 4:30 A.M. in the summer and 6:30 A.M. in the winter. On the 600-acre farm, there were days when Harry plowed, sowed, reaped, milked cows, fed hogs, doctored horses, baled hay and did a myriad of other chores.⁸ Harry's mother of ten said, "It was on the farm that Harry got his common sense. He didn't get it in town."⁹

While Harry was busy running the farm, his father began to indulge in politics, and attached himself to the growing Pendergast political machine that was reaching out from Kansas City into rural Jackson County. For his support, Harry's father was appointed an elections judge in the Grandview precinct in 1906. Harry served as his clerk. In 1910, John Truman was named by a Pendergast-backed judge as one of thirty-six road overseers. In this capacity he collected taxes and supervised a crew that worked on the roads. He also kept the Pendergast machine aware of the political atmosphere in his area.

Most road overseers did very little actual work, but not John Truman. One day in the summer of 1914, while inspecting a road, he found a boulder blocking traffic. Instead of getting the crew whose function

was to handle such matters, he removed the rock himself. Later that day, he suffered severe stomach pains, and eventually developed an intestinal block. After an operation in Kansas City and what appeared to be a satisfactorily progressing convalescence, John Truman died. Harry said, "I had been sitting with him and watching a long time. I fell asleep for a short time and when I woke up, he was dead."¹⁰

At the age of thirty, Harry found himself the man of the house. Not only did he manage the 600-acre farm, but 300 additional acres owned by his Uncle Harrison. He was given his father's old post of road overseer, but lost it later when an argument ensued over a proposed road-improvement program. In 1915, he was named postmaster of Grandview.

By this time, Harry Truman had become very interested in politics and had been attending the weekly meetings of the Kansas City Tenth Ward Democratic Club for close to a year. Although Truman took politics seriously, apparently others did not consider him in the same light. Tom Evans, who later became one of Harry's closest friends, said, "If anyone there had been asked then if this quiet fellow had a political future, it would have got a big horse laugh."¹¹

Although Harry worked hard during the years he spent on the farm, there are several indications that farming did not adequately satisfy his energies and goals. For a while he traveled to Kansas City every week to attend National Guard meetings. He was carrying on an increasingly successful courtship in Independence with Bess Wallace. And in 1916, he turned to speculating in mining and later in oil.

His interest in mining came first. Harry, his friend Jerry Culbertson, and a man by the name of Tom Hughes, took an interest in a zinc mine at Commerce, Oklahoma. Culbertson claimed that the mine

contained rich veins that had been overlooked. Harry invested \$2,000. After months of effort, there was no trace of metal. The hoisting engineer, Bill Troop, asked Harry to raise another \$2,500 for a drilling machine to be used in another operation in Picher, Oklahoma, but Harry couldn't raise the money. Recalling the situation later, he said, "If I'd done it we'd be rolling in wealth."¹²

In September, 1916, Harry made a plunge in the oil business. This venture cost him \$5,000 in cash and \$5,000 in notes to be paid in ten months. The contract Truman signed with Culbertson, his former associate in the mining business, and David Morgan, was for a third interest in the firm of Morgan and Company. The contract established Truman as the company treasurer. Although it was agreed that Truman would continue to supervise the 600-acre Truman farm, he spent much of his time in town. Those who remember Truman during those days, remember him as being far-from-rustic. Farmer Truman had become a city man, too.¹³

For Truman the oil man, time was running out. "At the time the war came," Truman recalled, "we had a well down nine hundred feet on a three-hundred-and-twenty-acre lease at Eureka, Kansas." For reasons still not fully agreed upon, the Morris No. 1 well and the leased acreage were sold. Truman's interpretation was: "My partners got into a fuss and let that lease go to pot. Another company took it over and drilled a well on it and there was never a dry hole found on that three hundred and twenty acres. It was the famous Teeter Pool."¹⁴

Although it apparently wasn't in the cards for Truman to strike it rich in the oil business, he lost no money in the transaction. According to Morgan the five notes for \$1,000 each were "soon paid off from the profits accruing to the one third interest which Harry had purchased."¹⁵

From War to Politics

Truman had quit the Missouri National Guard in 1911, but when the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, he went to work with Major John L. Miles to build a regiment out of a couple of undermanned artillery batteries. Truman did such a good job rounding up men that he once remarked that he should be made sergeant for his work. Much to his surprise, he was chosen as a lieutenant instead.

Later, in reflecting on his life, Truman once remarked, "My whole political career is based on my war service and war associates."¹⁶ Less obvious but equally significant was his career before the war that made him the soldier he was. To say that he ran a regimental canteen, was a battalion adjutant, and a battery commander indicates he did his job well. But even to say that he took a battery that was about to be broken up and made it into a functioning unit only scratches the surface about Truman and the war. Perhaps the most important aspect of the war as far as he was concerned was the great number of friends he made and the reputation he earned. Speaking of his command of Battery D, Truman once said, "I always tried to do every job I got better than anybody had ever done it before."¹⁷

The Armistice found Truman and his men of Battery D on a rocky hillside east of Verdun. During the following five months, while awaiting orders to head home, many of the swift associations made during the war became firmly fixed. It was a time when men could reflect. Few could forget how Truman spotted enemy batteries and conducted his own reconnaissance far ahead of his own troops. Although the regimental commander refused to give Truman any medals for doing what he was supposed to do, the regimental historian wrote "How many of the men of the infantry, digging in on the open hillsides overhanging Charpentry

and Baulny, owe their lives to the alertness, initiative and efficiency of Captain Truman and the quick responsiveness and trained efficiency of his men at the guns'"¹⁸

Finally, on April 9, 1919, Truman and the other men of 129th Regiment boarded a German liner for the voyage back home. Gone from the United States barely a year, Truman was returning with dozens of friends and with experience some men never get. "I've always been sorry I did not get a university education in the regular way," Truman said later. "But I got it in the Army the hard way--and it stuck."¹⁹

When Truman was discharged from the service on May 6, 1919, he had no firm plans. "I didn't know what I wanted to do," he said later. "I had \$15,000 or \$20,000 and eighty acres of land which I had inherited from my uncle."²⁰ However, two things were apparently very clear to him; he was not returning to the farm, and he was going to marry Bess Wallace.

After the wedding, which took place on June 28, 1919, Truman's greatest concern was how he would support himself and Bess. His old oil company was still in existence, but after discussing the matter with his partner, Dave Morgan, it was agreed that the firm should be dissolved. One morning in July, during a visit to Kansas City, Truman happened to run into Eddie Jacobson, the former sergeant who had helped him manage the regimental canteen at Camp Doniphan. While they reflected on their high success with the canteen, Truman remarked, "Maybe we ought to go into business together, and have a partnership again "²¹ After a brief discussion, Truman and Jacobson decided to open a men's furnishings store. Truman raised \$20,000 by selling the stock and equipment of the Young farm, and with the money Jacobson

invested, they were able to open their doors for business on November 29, 1919.

The store was well situated for business on the ground floor of the old Baltimore Hotel, across the street from the Muehlebach Hotel in downtown Kansas City. Times were good and they anticipated no difficulties in moving their \$35,000 inventory. Jacobson told a reporter, "Twelfth Street was in its heyday and our war buddies and the Twelfth Street boys and girls were our customers . . . We sold silk shirts at sixteen dollars."²² During the first year of operation they sold over \$70,000 worth of goods. With their sights on even greater profits to come, they plowed their earnings back into stock. It was a hectic year, a six-day-a-week proposition that seldom allowed Truman to get home before midnight.

During the second year of business, things turned sour. Shortly after the Harding Administration took office in March, 1921, farm prices began to slide. With less money in the pockets of the farmers, it wasn't long before the prices of goods began dropping, too. Truman and Jacobson had bought their inventory when the prices were high, but now that prices had dropped, they were forced to cut their prices until there was no profit margin. By early 1922, the inventory previously valued at \$35,000 had dropped to a value of less than \$10,000. Money was getting tight all over and people were getting scared. For the first time, creditors became curt in their demands for payment. Crisis was upon them.

After borrowing money to pay off creditors and attempting to delay the inevitable, the day finally came when they could no longer continue. Their plight was not unusual, small businessmen all around them were going into bankruptcy to wipe out their debts. However, neither

Truman nor Jacobson was willing to accept the stigma of bankruptcy. Instead they returned their remaining stock to their creditors, who agreed to accept it if Truman and Jacobson would agree to pay the balance. Truman estimated his venture in the haberdashery business cost him \$30,000.

By February, 1925 the pressure of continuing debts was too much for Eddie Jacobson, and he filed a petition in bankruptcy. Lawyers advised Truman to do the same, but he refused and insisted upon paying off all debts incurred by him and Jacobson, although Jacobson was now free of them. After Jacobson went into bankruptcy he met Truman one day, and when Truman saw that his shirt and suit were frayed, he insisted that Jacobson take the few dollars in his billfold and buy new clothes. In later years, Eddie Jacobson reimbursed Truman for half the debts he repaid.

As for Truman's indebtedness, it became increasingly complex as the years went by. The Security State bank, where he had a \$5,000 loan, had its assets taken over by the Continental National Bank. On April 30, 1929, the bank obtained a court judgment against him amounting to \$8,944.78. Also, the bank took over the 160-acre farm deeded as security. A few years later, when the Continental National Bank failed during the depression and Truman was in the Senate, he purchased his note, which was put up for \$1,000, through his brother Vivian. Thus ended the long years of financial misery brought on by Truman's electing to do what he thought was right, rather than what was popular.²³

Judge Truman

During the time Truman stood behind the counter of his haberdashery surrounded by unsalable merchandise and no customers, he had ample time to evaluate and contemplate his future. Perhaps he noted that other

ex-soldiers were doing well in politics, or perhaps he was tired of trying to make it in business. But whatever the reason, Truman had decided to enter politics.

In Jackson County, entering politics required more than just making an announcement. If a man didn't have the support of one of the political machines, he couldn't get anywhere. Fortunately for Truman, one of his former military acquaintances was Jim Pendergast. With the help of Truman's friends and relatives, Mike Pendergast, Jim's father and head of the Pendergast machine in rural Jackson County, became convinced that Harry Truman was the right man to run for judge for Eastern Jackson County.

In June, "Big Mike," as he was called, had a meeting of his Tenth Ward Democratic Club. The top political bosses from every township in the county was on hand and the beer flowed freely. After the routine business was over and the crowd settled down, Mike rapped on the table and said, "Now I'm going to tell you who you're going to support for county judge. It's Harry Truman. Harry Truman is a returned soldier, a captain 'over there' with a fine record and whose men didn't want to shoot him!"²⁴

Truman faced stiff opposition in the Democratic primary, and indications were that his first race would be his last. Emmett Montgomery, who was the strongest of the opposition against Truman in the primary, tried to destroy him early in the campaign by showing that he had actively supported a Republican for county marshal in 1920. Confronted with the charge at a picnic in Oak Grove, Truman responded:

"You have heard that I voted for John Miles for county marshal. I'll have to plead guilty to that charge, along with some five thousand ex-soldiers. I was closer to John Miles than a brother. I have seen him in places that made

hell look like a playground. I have seen him stick to his guns when Frenchmen were falling back. I have seen him hold the American line when only John Miles and his three batteries were between the Germans and a successful counter-attack. He was of the right stuff, and a man who wouldn't vote for his comrade under circumstances such as these would be untrue to his country. I know every soldier understands it. I have no apology to make for it."²⁵

With the voting support of his friends and relatives and with John Miles preventing ballots from being stuffed, Truman won the primary and went on to defeat his Republican opponent. Thus, Harry Truman had attained the first goal of his political career.

Truman had not joined the Ku Klux Klan as some had suggested in 1922. Although an organizer of the Klan implied that the Klan would be glad to support him as a member, apparently Truman felt the price was too high. When he was told, "You've got to promise us you won't give a Catholic a job if you belong to us and we support you," Truman responded by saying, "I won't agree to anything like that. I had a Catholic battery in the war and if any of those boys need help I'm going to give them a job."²⁶ Between 1921 and 1924, Klan membership went from 100,000 to 5,000,000. According to a popular joke during the period, the Klan didn't just hate Catholics, Jews, and Negroes. They hated everybody. Again, Truman elected to do what was right instead of what was popular.

By the time the 1924 election came around, Truman was no longer an unknown. He had done a good job as judge and many people knew it. In June, 1924, The Kansas City Star, never a partisan of the Pendergast machine, said, "the county court of which Truman was a member had in less than a full term 'reduced a deficit of \$1,200,000, left by the plundering Bulger machine, approximately one half and have in the county treasury besides a balance of \$270,000.'"²⁷ Truman won the

renomination handily.

The Republicans, who also had a primary that spring, were down to the last day of filing without a candidate. Perplexed with having no candidate, Truman's Republican friend, Major Miles, discussed the matter with another of Truman's Republican friends, Judge Bundschu, and they decided to file the name of one of Miles' deputies with the understanding that he would withdraw as soon as a better qualified candidate could be found. According to Bundschu he paid five dollars and filed for Henry Rummell without his knowing about it. Although Miles went to Rummell and suggested that he withdraw, Rummell had already been promised the support of Joe Shannon, head of the anti-Pendergast Democrats, and the Ku Klux Klan, and was not about to withdraw. Shannon, the Klan, and the Republicans proved to be too much for Truman, and he lost by 867 votes. Harry Truman was again out of work.

In 1925, Truman solved his employment problem when he found a job selling memberships in the Kansas City Automobile Club. Within a year he was making more money than he had made as a county judge. But there was another tide of events for Truman in 1925. It was the year he quit law school, started only the year before. And it was also the year his daughter Margaret, born the previous year, was to suffer from the flu, pneumonia, and rheumatic fever. Truman soon became tired of selling memberships "because it required too much traveling."²⁸

Truman was provided a chance to get out of the selling business by Spencer Salisbury, a former war associate and member of a highly respected Independence family. Salisbury offered Truman an opportunity to become a banker without investing a dime. Without questioning why anyone was willing to give up a profitable bank for no cash, Truman,

Salisbury, and Arthur Metzger each signed a \$10,000 promissory note and became bankers. About two months after taking over the bank, the reason for the unusual sale arrangement was discovered. While checking the bank's records, it was determined that the bank was nothing more than a "blind." According to Spencer Salisbury, "It seems that Charles U. Becker, the Republican Secretary of the State of Missouri, wanted a bank where he could borrow money for his printing business. And that was it. All the bank's cash assets were the funds from state auto licenses that were deposited here. Becker and his friends put up notes that weren't worth a damn . . . We didn't have a bank--we had a bank failure on our hands."²⁹ Truman and his associates, although taking different routes, got out of the banking business without loss, but the depositors lost between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Again, Truman stayed with the matter until it was resolved

At the same time Truman and his two associates were involved in the banking fiasco, they also became partners in a savings and loan business. This venture proved considerably more successful, even with the sharp decline in home building that began in 1926. In the early days of the savings and loan business, Salisbury helped Truman become president of the National Old Trails Association, an organization dedicated to building national highways over the famous trails that shaped American history. This job required Truman to do a lot of traveling as well as public speaking. As a speaker, Truman was described as having a weak voice and nervous mannerisms. But while he was obviously not a polished speaker, his lack of polish was viewed by some as making him appear "more human." In short, the man was the message

By mid-1926, as the Democratic primaries approached, Truman had

set his sights on a new job. He wanted to be county collector, a job which paid \$25,000 a year, but he knew that he would have to have the backing of Tom Pendergast, the boss of the Kansas City political machine. After talking to "Big Tom" and receiving an emphatic "No," Truman decided to run for presiding judge, the job for which Pendergast had promised his support. As the result of an agreement between Tom Pendergast and Joe Shannon, Truman had no opposition in the primary. With only the Republicans and the Klan against him, Truman won by 16,000 votes.

The question in the minds of many of Truman's backers concerned whether Truman could provide the honest and economic government he had promised and still satisfy Pendergast and Shannon. Truman hired a lot of Pendergast's friends for key jobs, as he had been instructed to do, but he fired them if they "didn't work in the county interest." After several other moves, such as setting up an inspection and audit system to catch crooked contractors, the Pendergast operation went into an uproar. According to Tom Evans, "They weren't accustomed to anyone acting on his own. Any day they expected Old Tom to squelch Harry. But he never lifted a finger."³⁰

By the time Truman finished his term of office, he had done a good job and people knew it. The Kansas City Times described him as being "extraordinarily honest," and said that there was "not a suspicion of graft involved in his road program."³¹ When Truman ran for his second four-year term, he had several reasons to feel confident. He was well established and a Pendergast lieutenant. Even after several attempts to discredit him, Truman won the race by some 58,000 votes.

During the following four years, Truman continued with his road

program and took on new ventures with success. During this period, Kansas City experienced the effects of organized crime operating under the rule of a Pendergast lieutenant. Johnny Lazia, known as the "Al Capone of Kansas City" was not concerned with Truman, who was busy in rural Jackson County building roads and courthouses.

With the approach of 1934, Truman realized the traditional length of service for a presiding judge was two terms and that he would have a major struggle to prevent being dumped by the Pendergast machine. Truman's expectations of the future were expressed in a memo to himself, written a few days after his fiftieth birthday in May, 1934: "I thought . . . that retirement in some minor county office was all that was in store for me."³²

If one were to attempt to characterize Harry Truman's rhetorical development as of 1934, it would certainly have several dimensions. From a physical aspect Truman was less than inspiring. Although not a large man, he was often described as appearing smaller than he really was. He had a weak, high voice and nervous mannerisms. However, when one looks beyond how Truman appeared to how Truman actually was, there is an entirely different perspective of the person. Truman was a man who had gained much credibility in the eyes of those who knew him. The fact that he was supported by the Pendergast machine and managed to be his "own man" concerning his campaign promises attests to that. Truman was a man of the people. He understood their needs, he understood their values, and he talked their language. When he addressed an issue, he went straight to the point that was of interest to the people. Concerning his road building program, Truman said consideration would be given "only to practical needs--not political." Afterwards he said, "this

county plan was based on practical needs, it was carried out along practical lines, its effect will be for the practical benefit of every citizen'"³³ Truman made his rhetoric simple to follow, on the subject, and about vital matters.

Although one might conclude that Truman was not a polished speaker in 1934, few would say he was not persuasive. Perhaps those very qualities that prevented him from being polished were the qualities that made him persuasive. As a politician addressing the people of Jackson County, Truman must have identified with their needs, their values, and their approach to matters. He was viewed by most as a man of character, and in the words of Aristotle, "his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses."³⁴

Senator Who?

When Democratic Senator Bennett Clark made his proclamation in Washington that he would smash the Pendergast machine and name Missouri's next Senator, Tom Pendergast took it as a personal threat. Roscoe Conkling Patterson, a Republican, was the incumbent, but, with the New Deal riding high, the Democrat that won the primary was almost assured of beating him in the fall election.

Pendergast wanted Jim Reed to run against Clark's announced candidate, Jacob L. "Tuck" Milligan, but after much stalling and deliberation, Reed decided not to run. Pendergast even asked Joe Shannon to accept the nomination, but he had a safe seat in the House and had too much to lose by running. Next, Pendergast turned to James P. Aylward, Jackson County Democratic Chairman, but he refused the offer, too. Pendergast was in a quandary.

Why Pendergast decided to run Truman isn't completely clear.

Perhaps he gave up winning and just wanted to fill the ticket, or perhaps he thought Truman had an outside chance. What does seem clear is that most observers didn't give Truman any chance at all. "I don't think Truman's heavy enough for the Senate," Joe Shannon said, "I can't imagine him there and I doubt if he can be elected."³⁵

Truman opened his campaign in July opposed not only by Milligan, but by another formidable opponent named John J. Cochran, who had been praised publicly by President Roosevelt. Not long after entering the race against Truman and Milligan, Cochran was voted one of the six most useful members of the House, by Capital correspondents. Undaunted by such formidable opposition, Truman went about his campaign in the usual Truman manner--taking nothing for granted and working as though his life depended on his winning. The Kansas City Times reported that in the history of Missouri "there have been few such spirited contests within a party." Truman later described his efforts when he wrote that he "went into sixty of Missouri's one hundred and fourteen counties" and "made six to sixteen speeches a day."³⁶

As the returns started coming in, it seemed that Truman was going to finish just as predicted. Votes outside Jackson County showed 234,580 for Cochran, 139,321 for Truman, and 138,702 for Milligan. When the votes were counted for the Pendergast territory, Truman had won the primary by 40,000 votes. The November general election found Truman a rather confident challenger. He spent a total of \$785 campaigning against Patterson. To no one's surprise, Truman won by 262,000 votes.

When Harry Truman went to Washington to embark on his new career, in many ways he was like a fish out of water. There were things completely new to him in Washington and a few he didn't understand at all. His lack

of grasp was reflected in his speech to the Kansas City Elks Club. The New York Times, on December 18, 1934, made the following comments about his speech in an editorial titled "Just a Farmer Boy." which read:

Judge Henry [sic] S. Truman, Senator-elect from Missouri, is not moved as yet by the splendors of Washington or the majesty of the Senate. If the will of Tom Pendergast and the people has called him to the Senate, his heart is true to the rivers of the home country, the Kansas and the Missouri, Big Blue and Little Run. In his speech to his brother Elks and tillers of the soil in Kansas City--whose agriculturalists gave him 135,000 of his fat majority--he was "just a farmer boy from Jackson County." He wasn't going to make a splurge at Washington. He was going to "keep his feet on the ground." ³⁷ That, he said in language highly indecorous for a sub-freshman.

Harry Truman came to Washington viewed by most as being not the representative of the state, but the personal representative of one of the most corrupt political machines in the country. Many of his peers avoided him. Pat McCarran of Nevada once said he "never considered him a Senator."³⁸ Victor Messall, when first offered the job of being Truman's secretary, said, "I didn't see any future in an association like that. Here was a guy--a punk--sent up by gangsters. I told myself I'd lose my reputation if I worked for him."³⁹

It took a while for the people in Washington to learn about the "real" Harry Truman. By the time Truman brought his family to Washington and they were settled down, Truman asked Messall again to serve as his aide. Messall recalled, "By now I realized that my original impression of him was all wet. This was a man of real integrity and brains and no Pendergast or anyone else was going to push him around. Once you got to know him you knew he had something special. So I agreed to go to work for him."⁴⁰

Truman found his speaking requirements as a Senator more torturous

than campaigning or talking before Jackson County folks Messall recalls: "Every time he had to make a speech he'd tell me, 'I can't do it.'" Early in his Senatorial career a news crew was sent to record a speech. After many retakes and attempts to get Truman to speak up, the crew was ready to walk off. Messall persuaded them to make one more try. This time Truman did a passable job. As the crew was leaving, one of the sound men said in Truman's presence, "He ain't no Roosevelt."⁴¹

Truman worked hard to master his new job. He knew what his weaknesses were and spent much time improving himself. His daughter Margaret remembered that he "brought home mountains of work and long after I was in bed he would be reading and studying his problems."⁴² To keep abreast of happenings on a daily basis, he rose before 6:00 A.M. and read two Washington papers from cover to cover. He spent considerable time in the evenings at the Library of Congress. During the time Truman was involved in a subcommittee investigating railroad finances, he had the Library of Congress send him fifty volumes concerning railroads, which he then read in detail.

Although Truman's first term as Senator enabled him to demonstrate to many of his peers and superiors just what Harry Truman was made of, it was also a time of frustration. It was a time that saw much of his work regarding legislation become bogged down by petty bickering. It was a time that saw Tom Pendergast develop such a mania for gambling on horse racing that he was forced to "indulge in massive fraud to sustain this destructive compulsion."⁴³ And when Pendergast was sentenced to prison for income tax evasion, it must have been a time when it would have been easier for Truman to denounce his fallen supporter. But Truman

was not built of material that would allow him to give way to public pressure. Truman refused to do what was expedient. Instead, he stuck by old Tom, saying: "I'm not a rat who deserts a sinking ship." Truman's daughter recalls: "Never before or since can I recall my father being so gloomy as he was in those latter months of 1939, after Tom Pendergast went to prison. Nothing seemed to be going right."⁴⁴

With his transportation bill blocked in the Senate, Truman undoubtedly realized, as 1940 neared, that he had not made the usual political splash in his last year to remind voters that he had not been wasting his time or their money in Washington. This realization, teamed with the disarray of the Jackson County Democrats and Truman's association with the fallen Tom Pendergast, left him with a rather dismal political outlook.

Although Truman's first term in the Senate may not have provided him with the publicity he wanted and needed, it did result in a significant development rhetorically. As a result of his Senate experiences, he greatly increased his self-confidence and intellectual depth. Truman seemed inhibited or intimidated when he arrived in Washington, even cowed by suddenly being thrust into the presence of such esteemed men. He was reluctant to speak his mind. However, as he discovered that he was not intellectually inferior and as he increased his understanding of legislative matters, he began to speak with candor and conviction. Truman improved himself not only by constant reading, but by being a good listener. He found a source of new and meaningful ideas in his association with Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Louis D. Brandeis. The elderly justice took an immediate liking to Truman and he became a regular visitor to Brandeis' weekly teas. After a few visits

to the Brandeis apartment, Truman recalled that "the old man would back me in a corner and pay no attention to anyone else while he talked transportation to me. He was very much against the control of financial credit." Truman's first important speeches in the Senate were described as being "distilled Brandeisesese with a dash of Missouri for flavor."⁴⁵

When Truman returned to Missouri in January, 1940, to see what kind of support he could muster for his second senatorial campaign, he found his supporters few in number and the prospects gloomy. Virtually everyone told him that "he didn't have a chance of winning."⁴⁶ There were many reasons for Harry Truman not to run for reelection and seemingly only one reason to run. Truman had little support, no money, and Tom Pendergast was in prison. Many people had already written Truman off as a serious contender. However, the very fact that Truman was given no chance to win without the backing of Tom Pendergast made his not running impossible. Having been labeled as the Washington Ambassador of Pendergast, Truman responded: "I can't walk out on the charges that have been made against me. For my own self-respect, if nothing else, I must run."⁴⁷

When Truman began his campaign he found himself virtually without newspaper support and forced to cover the state making speeches. Although he may have gained speaking experience in the Senate, his delivery was still far from pleasing to the ear. At his opening campaign speech, Truman's good friend, Senator Schwellenbach, introduced him by saying, "I need not tell you that Harry Truman is not an orator. He can demonstrate that for himself." Truman's mother, who was sitting on the platform that day, said he was "such a bad speaker that it was pitiful."⁴⁸

Truman's campaign speeches may not have been uttered in the manner and style of an orator, but no one can deny his ability to speak in meaningful terms to intended audiences. Concerning equal opportunity he said:

I believe in the brotherhood of man, not merely the brotherhood of white men but the brotherhood of all men before the law . . . In giving the Negro the rights which are theirs we are only acting in accord with our ideals of a true democracy. . . . The majority of our Negro people find but cold comfort in shanties and tenements. Surely, as free men, they are entitled to something better than this . . . It is our duty to see that the Negro in our locality have increased opportunities to exercise their privilege as free men.⁴⁹

And he also knew how to get the truth to the people concerning his opponents. When Truman learned that Governor Stark, his primary opponent, was requiring state employees to contribute to his campaign fund, he reported the matter to his friend Senator Guy Gillette, Chairman of the Senate committee to investigate senatorial campaigns. According to Margaret Truman, the report of Senator Gillette's investigation "was a Sunday punch to Lloyd Stark's reformer image. 'There is abundance of evidence to prove that many employees were indirectly coerced into contributing, although they may not be in sympathy with the candidacy of Governor Stark for the U. S. Senate,' Senator Gillette said."⁵⁰

As the primary campaign neared its end, Stark announced that Truman was operating his campaign with an immense slush fund provided by Tom Pendergast. Truman promptly wired Senator Gillette, denying the charge and asking him to demand evidence from Stark. Since no proof was provided by Stark, on the eve of the primary Gillette issued the following statement: "In all fairness to Senator Truman and before the primary polls open, the public should know of the sending of this

telegram and the Governor's failure to acknowledge it."⁵¹

As a result of Truman's persuasive strategy concerning not only himself but his opponents, and his keenly-timed tactics, he won the primary by some 7,000 votes and the general election by some 40,000 votes.

Back to Washington

When Harry Truman returned to Washington after his reelection, he found the Capital buzzing with activity. As a result of the war in Europe, new Army camps were being established across the country and the initial wave of defense contracts were going out. Truman, like all of his fellow Senators, was busy trying to get as many defense contracts as he could for his home state. However, Truman soon found that the word had gone out, presumably from the White House, that certain Missouri politicians were to be ignored.

At approximately the same time, Truman found the vast majority of defense contracts going to a small portion of the country, he also discovered gross inefficiency and waste in defense spending. A friend wrote Truman about the appalling waste in the construction of Fort Leonard Wood near Rolla, Missouri. Other letters followed expressing the same complaint and, after Truman was sworn in for the second time on January 3, 1941, he departed Washington for a personal inspection tour of the defense program. His tour lasted a month and covered some 30,000 miles.

On February 10, Truman told his fellow Senators of the staggering waste and mismanagement he had personally observed in the defense program. In Senate Resolution 71, he recommended that a watchdog committee be created consisting of five senators to keep tabs on defense spending.

After some delay the Senate passed Truman's resolution and voted him \$10,000 to conduct the investigation.

Truman realized that his biggest problem was to serve a positive purpose without causing embarrassment to the Roosevelt Administration. He began his investigations by going directly to camps and holding hearings on the spot. What the Truman committee found was truly incredible. By August, 1941, the committee had "documented \$100 million of waste in the \$1 billion camp-building program."⁵² Truman was subsequently given \$85,000 to continue the work of the committee.

The Truman Committee had a long nose and a big stick. Not only did it look into camp construction, but virtually all aspects of defense spending. When the Curtiss-Wright Corporation passed defective aircraft engines in one plant, the committee condemned four hundred engines. When it was discovered that the wingspread of the B-26 Martin Bomber was too short for stability, Truman forced Martin to make the necessary changes in construction by threatening to stop future military purchases.

Many Truman charges led to belated changes in the armed forces. General Brehon Somervell, whose Services of Supply caught much flak from the Truman Committee, later said that changes brought about as a result of the committee report saved the Government around \$200,000,000. Clearly, the years Truman and his committee spent on overseeing defense spending saved the country billions of dollars. As Truman concluded: "the committee spent only \$360,000 but saved the nation fifteen billion."⁵³

There are two interesting aspects of how Truman handled the investigations into defense spending in addition to his saving money. First, he determined the information about defense spending and waste by going directly to the scene. His first Senate report, as previously

mentioned, was based on a 30,000 mile fact-finding trip. His investigations of army camps were conducted on the site. This technique of obtaining information says much about his understanding of human nature and persuasion. According to Aristotle: "The first thing to remember is this. Whether our argument concerns public affairs or some other subject, we must know some, if not all, of the facts about the subject on which we are to speak and argue."⁵⁴ And second, Truman's willingness to threaten large corporations with terminating their defense contracts demonstrates very emphatically that he had attained the sort of political clout and persuasive maturity that comes with the development of self-confidence.

When columnists suggested that a change had come over Truman in recent years, he replied: "I haven't changed. I am the same person I was five or ten years ago."⁵⁵ It is probably true that Truman was essentially the same person as far as his personal convictions and beliefs were concerned. However, the real change was in his realization that he had achieved stature and influence as a public figure operating at the national level.

Eventhough Truman made significant improvements concerning his ability to function effectively within his role in the national government, there were other roles which made him uncomfortable. As a prominent Senator in much demand as a speaker, he still refused speech-making whenever possible. He was not an orator and he knew it. He was even offered six hundred dollars and expenses for making a series of lectures, but declined saying he wouldn't do it for any price.⁵⁶

Primarily because of Truman's efforts in probing defense spending, his name was being mentioned more and more as a possible vice-presidential

nominee. However, by the time the Democratic National Convention was held, Roosevelt still had not made his preference for a running mate known. Truman was receiving a good deal of pressure to seek the nomination actively, but he refused to act without an indication from Roosevelt that he was wanted on the ticket. After considerable delay, Roosevelt finally admitted that Harry Truman was his preference.

Although Truman had little opportunity to persuade the convention members concerning his nomination, he certainly made maximum use of at least one. Actively entering the fight for nomination, Truman told reporters, "I will win. I wouldn't be in the race if President Roosevelt didn't approve."⁵⁷ With this timely verbal stroke, he skillfully undermined the candidacy of Henry Wallace, the only person standing in his way of being nominated. Truman did win, and he and Roosevelt went on to a resounding victory over Dewey and the Republicans.⁵⁸

The President as Paradox

Truman had been Vice-President a very short time when President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, an event that thrust Truman into a period of unparalleled crisis and complexity. Mrs. Roosevelt obviously sensed the awesomeness of the task ahead for Truman even in her moment of gravest sorrow. When he arrived at the White House and asked Mrs. Roosevelt if there was anything he could do for her, she replied, "Is there any way we can help you?"⁵⁹

As President, Truman found the straight-forward manner developed as a farmer, artillery captain, county judge, and senator often alien to his sophisticated audiences. Once, for example, after being scolded by Truman about Russia's violating the Yalta Agreement, Molotov heatedly replied: "I have never been talked to like that in my life." "Carry

out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that,"⁶⁰ Truman countered.

One of Truman's strong points had always been his ability to understand other people. Perhaps the antithesis of this quality--not understanding Harry Truman--was the quality most often found in his critics. For those who knew Truman, he was a man of unusual humility, loyalty, common sense, patriotism, and understanding. For those who dared not go beyond his apparent lack of sophistication, he appeared earthy, unpolished, not an FDR, blunt, quick, and capable of making mistakes. Truman was, in a sense, a walking contradiction. The inconsistency between his innocuous outward appearance and his inner character and immense personal strength was unfathomable to many who "knew" him. This inconsistency is important in Truman's rhetorical development because his outward appearance of vulnerability and weakness gave ammunition to Truman's opponents and likewise affected his credibility as President.

The Congress made the mistake of thinking Truman would be a middle-of-the-road, unassuming President, but they soon found him to be a man with a mind of his own and the courage to back it up. His failure to "fit the mold" made him the butt of jokes. "One bright saying went, 'to err is Truman', another, 'What would Truman do if he were alive?'" And Truman had a falling-out with Congress on September 6, 1945 that was to last the length of his Presidency. His opponents began to use every trick in the book to discredit him. Newspapers began to assess him as "bewildered," a "little man" who "never seemed to understand."⁶¹

Truman had only one criterion that he applied to the many decisions

that fell on him before and after the war--"What is the right thing to do?" However, unlike the issues that confronted him before he became President, the difference between right and wrong became increasingly less evident in the complexities of adjusting from war to peace. More and more often he found himself in the middle of things, trying to satisfy contending forces and being personally blamed for any new problems that arose. On March 31, 1947, George Gallup made the following comments concerning Truman's ability and credibility determined from public opinion polls:

His popularity in the early months of his term overshadowed even that of his predecessor Franklin D. Roosevelt . . . Then as reconversion problems multiplied, Mr. Truman's popularity began to coast downward, at first gently, then rapidly, the downswing culminating in an Institute poll figure of 32 percent in October 1946. There was a meat shortage, the future of O.P.A. was in confusion, the administration's foreign policy was also subject to confusion owing to Henry A. Wallace's speech which seemingly contradicted the policies of Secretary of State Byrnes. Republicans were campaigning effectively on the "had enough" slogan.

The president's popularity did not begin to turn noticeably upward until January 1947. Then it jumped from 35 percent to 48 percent.

At the time of Gallup's report, Truman's popularity had reached sixty percent. Gallup credited Truman's firm handling of John L. Lewis and the administration's proposed showdown with the Russians over the issue of Greece and Turkey as being the primary reasons for the upswing.⁶²

Similarly, Truman put principle ahead of expediency and in fact demonstrated little regard for political timing. Dave Niles, in charge of handling minority and religious matters for the White House, said, "Roosevelt did not believe in getting too far in front of the people. He had far greater patience than Truman and planned long-range educational programs to win popular support before he acted. When Truman saw a problem, he wanted it settled on the spot."⁶³

Such was the case for example, in 1948. Without conferring with Congressional leaders, Truman sent to Congress a ten-point civil rights message calling for strengthening of civil rights laws, a Federal law against lynching, and the protection of the right to vote. The result--fifty-two Southern Congressmen said they would not support him for reelection. At a White House luncheon Mrs. Leonard Thomas, a national committeewoman from Alabama, told him, "I want to take a message back to the South. Can I tell them you're not ramming miscegenation down our throats? That you're for all the people, not just the North?" Before replying he read the Bill of Rights to her. Then he said, "I'm everybody's President. I take back nothing of what I proposed and make no excuse for it."⁶⁴

Truman's lack of concern for political timeliness almost cost him the 1948 election. In October, 1947, according to the Gallup Poll, fifty-five percent of the people approved of the way Truman was running the nation. However, in April, 1948, after the introduction of the civil rights message in February, his popularity dropped thirty-six percent.⁶⁵ Perhaps it was again the fact that everyone had counted Truman out that prompted him to do that which he did best: get his message across to the people with the facts, and he made them stick. The innocuous "little" man whose oratory had been described as "pitiful" pulled off another political miracle.

The Decline of Truman's Public Image

In January, 1949, shortly after the election, Truman's popularity was at sixty-nine percent according to the Gallup Poll.⁶⁶ The year 1949 also brought with it the "loss" of China to the Communists, the detonation of the first Soviet atomic device, and the trials that eventually ended in

the conviction of Alger Hiss for perjury (for denying that he performed acts of espionage for the Soviet Union). These events were to a large extent responsible for creating a favorable climate for launching the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy. The Communist victory in China provided McCarthy with a potent issue, and the conviction of Hiss made subsequent attacks against the State Department and the Truman Administration credible to many.⁶⁷

The charges made by Whittaker Chambers against Alger Hiss had not become an important issue in the campaign of 1948, but on December 15, Hiss was indicted for perjury. The statute of limitations prevented him from being charged with conspiring to commit espionage.

Hiss's first trial ended in a hung jury in July, 1949. The second trial began some ten months later and ended with Hiss's conviction on January 21, 1950. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, speaking just four days after the verdict, told the press, "I will not turn my back on Alger Hiss."⁶⁸ According to Alan D. Harper in The Politics of Loyalty. "That statement came to some as a perfect illumination: the difficulties the United States had experienced with the Soviet Union, the disaster in China, were not the result of errors in policy; that had been the consequence of treason in high places."⁶⁹

Republican Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin found the loyalty issue fertile ground for planting seeds of fear and suspicion. On February 9, 1950, he began a weekend speaking tour that would take him from obscurity to national fame. Claiming as his authority a letter written nearly four years before by Secretary of State Byrnes, McCarthy stated that he had in his "hand a list of two hundred and five [members of the State Department] that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working,

and shaping the policy of the State Department."⁷⁰

Being all too aware of the need to restore balance in considering matters of loyalty and security programs, Truman convened a meeting at the Blair House on June 22, to discuss the possibility of establishing a commission of distinguished citizens to investigate the government employee loyalty program. At the end of the meeting, no decision had been reached other than to hold a subsequent meeting. That meeting never came because of the attack on South Korea just three days later.⁷¹

Nevertheless, the loss of faith in the foreign policy arm of the government had already occurred, Truman was in trouble. From January, 1949 to June, 1950, his popularity as determined by the Gallup Poll had dropped by some thirty-two percent. Gallup attributed the decline to "increasing tenseness of the world situation, the Communists gains in Asia," and "the constant criticism leveled at the State Department."⁷² With the government's credibility breached, the Communists wasted little time seizing the advantage.

Some understanding of the decline of Truman's public image immediately prior to the invasion of South Korea is important for several reasons. First, it provides a basis for evaluating Truman's level of rhetorical development and motivation. Second, it provides an essential dimension to the decision-making process with regard to Korea. Finally, and most important, it indicates the nature of the rhetorical environment within which Truman was forced to operate.

Truman from the Inside

Although much information about an individual can be gained from observing and studying his behavior, sometimes the observer attributes incorrect causes to a given response. In trying to gain an additional

dimension into Truman's development as a rhetorical agent, it seems appropriate to look for recurrent themes or patterns in Truman's life. Perhaps the single most recurring theme was Truman's concern for right-doing. This theme is vividly shown in the following portion of Truman's personal prayer which he wrote as a young man and carried with him always, a prayer that apparently provided him with comfort and consistency from high school to the White House:

Oh! Almighty and everlasting God, creator of Heaven, Earth and the Universe:

Help me to be, to think, to act what is right, because it is right; make me truthful, honest and honorable in all things; make me intellectually honest for the sake of right and honor and without thought of reward for me . . .⁷³

The theme of right-doing was best reflected in Truman's views on religion. "The most interesting thing to me," he wrote, "is over here in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew."⁷⁴ Interestingly enough the fifth chapter of St. Matthew says in part: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake . . . Great is your reward in heaven . . ."⁷⁵

Truman was seldom if ever deterred from his pursuit of right-doing, even in the face of strong public and political pressure. His study of history provided him with a perception of the present and its relationship to the future often beyond the grasp of his associates. Aristotle acknowledged the importance of understanding the past when he said: "The political speaker will also find the researches of the historian useful."⁷⁶ Truman's understanding of the present through historical study and his pursuit of right-doing are further shown through his conversation with William Hillman.

In going over the history of various Presidents I find that there is nothing new. There never was a more thoroughly misrepresented man than Thomas Jefferson. Of course, you are familiar with how they treated Andrew Jackson. Following him the two most thoroughly misrepresented were Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson. They almost hounded Cleveland to his grave. It is interesting to read the lies they published about him and Mrs. Cleveland.

Lincoln, of course, was thoroughly misrepresented and it took fifty years to get at the truth. So I don't let these things bother me for the simple reason I know that I am trying to do the right thing and eventually the facts will come out. I'll probably be holding a conference with Saint Peter when that happens . . .

It is the business of the President to meet situations as they arise and meet them in the public interest.⁷⁷

Truman's sense of right-doing, his knowledge of the past, and his conviction that truth existed beyond the selfish motives of man constituted his "inwardness," and inwardness that only those who knew him best ever recognized as essential principles upon which his life moved and his decisions were made.

Summary

In reviewing Truman's development as a rhetorical agent, several salient characteristics emerge. His background as a farmer not only made Truman identifiable with farmers, but workers in general. He had stood in their shoes, suffered their pain, and talked their language. As an officer in the artillery Truman learned the meaning of being responsible for others and administering to their needs. And his understanding of human nature, already acquired before entering the war, allowed him to take a unit about to be dismantled and make it into an effective organization.

His study of the Bible and history gave him a perception not only of right and wrong but of the natural and recurring relationship between man and events. He developed a unique understanding of relevance of the past to the present and the future that often carried him beyond the comprehension of his associates. Perhaps his perception of the recurring relationship

between man and events was the primary factor that sustained him in the face of opposition. Once he determined a decision to be right, he stuck with it to the end. This was the nature and development of the man who made the long climb from farmer to politician, from county judge to President of the United States.

Footnotes

¹Alfred Steinberg, The Man from Missouri (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), pp. 19-20.

²Ibid., pp. 23-27.

³Ibid., p. 27.

⁴Ibid., p. 28.

⁵Jonathan Daniels, The Man of Independence (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1950), pp. 51-52.

⁶Steinberg, pp. 29-30

⁷Ibid., p. 30.

⁸Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁹Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 34.

¹¹Ibid., p. 35.

¹²Ibid., p. 39.

¹³Daniels, pp. 81-82.

¹⁴Steinberg, p. 40.

¹⁵Daniels, p. 85.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 95

¹⁸Steinberg, p. 50

¹⁹Ibid., p. 50.

²⁰Daniels, p. 100

- ²¹Steinberg, p. 54.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Ibid., pp. 55-58
- ²⁴Ibid.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 63.
- ²⁶Daniels, p. 124.
- ²⁷quoted in Daniels, p. 125.
- ²⁸Steinberg, p. 80.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 81.
- ³⁰Ibid., pp. 86-87
- ³¹quoted in Daniels, p. 90.
- ³²Ibid., p. 109.
- ³³Daniels, p. 150.
- ³⁴Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.2.
- ³⁵Steinberg, p. 113.
- ³⁶quoted in Steinberg, p. 177
- ³⁷quoted in Steinberg, p. 123.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 126.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 125.
- ⁴⁰Ibid.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 135.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 136.
- ⁴³Margaret Truman, Harry S. Truman (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1973), p. 117.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.
- ⁴⁵Steinberg, p. 148.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷M. Truman, p. 120.

- ⁴⁸Steinberg, p. 171.
- ⁴⁹M. Truman, p. 128.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 129.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 131.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 140.
- ⁵³Daniels, p. 224.
- ⁵⁴Aristotle, Rhetoric 11.22.
- ⁵⁵Steinberg, p. 198.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 197.
- ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 215.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 218.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 234.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 242.
- ⁶¹Ibid., p. 263.
- ⁶²Papers on Gallup Poll, American Institute of Public Opinion, March 31, 1947, Truman Library.
- ⁶³Steinberg, p. 303.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 303-304.
- ⁶⁵Papers on Gallup Poll, April 23, 1948.
- ⁶⁶Papers on Gallup Poll, March 14, 1951.
- ⁶⁷Alan D. Harper, The Politics of Loyalty (Westpoint Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1969), p. 85.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 35.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 120
- ⁷⁰Ibid
- ⁷¹Ibid., p. 139.
- ⁷²Papers on Gallup Poll, April 12, 1950.
- ⁷³William Hillman, Mr. President (New York Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952), unnumbered foreword

⁷⁴Harry S. Truman, Mr. Citizen (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1960), p. 138.

⁷⁵St. Matthew 5.10-11.

⁷⁶Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.4.

⁷⁷Hillman, pp. 90-93.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT OF THE KOREAN PROBLEM AS A RHETORICAL EXIGENCE

Introduction

The Korean Conflict or "police action" as it was rather carelessly and unceremoniously dubbed, holds the special distinction of being the first war of limited objectives in the history of the United States. Waging, defining, justifying, and eliciting support for such a war created a need for rhetorical strategies and "god-terms" that were altogether different from those of general war. With little by way of precedent to draw from, Truman and his advisors were impelled to devise a rhetoric of limited commitment to fit the realities of a war of limited objectives.

Both the decision to "contain" the war in Korea and to "interpret" this policy to the nation in a certain way can be described as strategic choices for which Truman alone was responsible. This chapter focuses on the first of these choices. The purpose here is to trace the development of the Korean problem until it commanded attention as an "imperfection marked by urgency,"¹ and to show how Truman analyzed and responded to it. Chapter IV will deal with Truman's second strategy choice: his defense of U. S. participation in The Korean War.

Why War Came In Korea

At the beginning of World War II Korea was dominated by Japan,

primarily because of two wars at the turn of the century involving China, Japan, and Russia. Supremacy had been sought in Asia by both Japan and Russia, through domination of China. Both powers obviously saw Korea not only as a gateway to Manchuria, but a source of year-round harbors. China's interest in Korea, however, centered around the barrier it made against the ambitions of Japan and Russia.

During a conference held in 1845 between China and Japan, it was agreed that both nations would remove their troops from Korea and refrain from committing troops to that country in the future without informing the other side. This agreement only lasted until there was a domestic revolt in southern Korea in which the Korean ruler asked the Chinese for help. In response, the Chinese government sent 5,500 troops and, in accordance with their agreement, notified Japan. Japan, either not trusting the Chinese motives or looking for an excuse to re-enter Korea, sent 8,000 troops. With the arrival of the two powers on the scene, the revolt quickly subsided leaving the two forces facing each other. Fighting broke out and at the end of eight months, Japan had won a sweeping victory. A treaty was then made between the two countries by which China recognized the independence of Korea and Japan obtained Formosa.

In 1904-5, some ten years later, Japan and Russia were at war over the Far East, and Manchuria and Korea in particular. Again the Japanese were victorious and the two countries signed the Treaty of Portsmouth whereby Russia recognized Japan's predominant interests in Korea and agreed not to oppose any action Japan might take with regard to Korea. After the Portsmouth Conference, Japan assumed full control of Korea.²

The interest of Americans in the Orient actually began prior to the birth of the United States. The first treaty between the United States and China was negotiated by Caleb Cushing, and signed in 1844. This treaty provided that the United States would be granted any concessions granted by China to any other power. American influence was felt in a significant way following the fall of the Manchu Dynasty, when American and French forces, along with the British navy, put down the agrarian revolution and restored the Manchus to power. Although the revolution offered a real opportunity for healthy trade between China and the West, the American and British traders were more concerned with the immediate threat to the slave and opium trade.

Continuing their advances in the Orient, Americans opened Korea to Western penetration and exploitation in 1882, and in 1883 signed a treaty to aid Korea in case of unjust treatment by another country. However, when the King of Korea sought to send emissaries to the treaty session in Portsmouth following the Japan-Russia war of 1904-5, Theodore Roosevelt said in effect that the session was "none of his concern."³

The subject of Korea was a matter discussed at the Cairo Conference in 1943. President Franklin Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek, and Prime Minister Churchill all agreed that the enslaved people of Korea should eventually be free and independent. Korea's future was discussed again at Teheran, between Roosevelt and Stalin. Stalin agreed that Korea should become an independent nation, although it might take as much as forty years before it would be ready.

And Korea was again discussed when Roosevelt and Stalin met privately during the Yalta conference in February, 1945. Roosevelt suggested there ought to be a three-power trusteeship with the Soviets,

the Chinese, and the United States represented. Stalin added that the British should be asked to join the trusteeship arrangement. Stalin acknowledged this understanding after Truman became president when he told Harry Hopkins on May 28, 1945, that Russia was committed to the policy of a four-power trusteeship for Korea.

According to Truman: "Korea was mentioned by Molotov but not discussed at my conferences with the Russian Premier and the British Prime Ministers at Potsdam." Following Russia's entry into the Pacific war, it was agreed that "there should be a line of demarcation in the general area of Korea between American and Russian air and sea operations. There was no discussion of any zones for ground operations or for occupation, for it was not expected that either American or Soviet ground troops would enter Korea in the immediate future."⁴

Although it is true that during the month of August, 1945, the same month the Russians entered the war in the Pacific, a line was drawn across Korea at the 38th parallel, this was done only to facilitate the surrender of Japanese troops in the area. Russia would accept the surrender of troops north of the line, and the United States would accept the surrender of troops south of the line.⁵ The State Department urged the surrender of Japanese forces in all of Korea be accepted by Americans, but the United States had no troops there and no shipping to land forces at more than a few locations in the southern part of the country.⁶

Soon after the Japanese surrender in Korea, it became apparent that the Russians were treating the 38th parallel as a permanent dividing line. No traffic was allowed across the line without permission, and since most of Korea's meager industry was north of the line and most of the good farming land to the south of it, the division complicated and disrupted the normal life of the nation.

After three months of occupation, General Hodge, the U. S. commander in Korea, reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the dual occupation of the country had imposed an impossible condition for establishing a sound economy and preparing Korea for future independence. In the south, the United States was being blamed for splitting the country, and resentment was growing toward all Americans in the area. Hodge reported that although the Koreans were not ready for independence by Occidental standards, their capacity for self-government would not greatly improve as long as the dual occupation existed. Hodge also reported that the interim solution of trusteeship was so strongly disliked that if it were imposed the Korean people would likely revolt.

During a Foreign Ministers meeting in Moscow in December, 1945, Secretary Byrnes brought up the matter of Korea. On the second day of the meeting Molotov proposed on behalf of the Soviet government that a provisional government be set up in Korea to undertake all necessary measures for the development of the country. The proposal included that representatives of the United States and Russian commands in Korea meet within two weeks to consider urgent questions relating to both zones and work out arrangements for the establishment of a permanent co-ordination between the two commands in the administrative-economic sphere. With two minor changes, the Russian proposal was determined to be acceptable as presented.

On January 16, 1946, as agreed to in Moscow, the American and Russian commanders met, but almost immediately it became clear that no results would come from the talks. It was the Russian's position that the conference was to work out minor accommodations between the two zones. The U. S. position on the conference was that it should lead to the eventual joining of the zones.

The Joint Commission, which was the key element of the Moscow agreement, began its work at Seoul on March 20, 1946. After almost two months of trying to resolve who the commission should and should not listen to, on May 8, it adjourned sine die without ever getting close to the problems of the nation.

In January, 1947, General Hodge reported that Korea was near civil war, and economically the country was going from bad to worse. Black market activities were flourishing and conditions had brought about an almost complete breakdown of transportation.

Based on reports by Generals MacArthur and Hodge, Truman approved Secretary Marshall's plan for another attempt to make the Joint Commission work. In April and May, the Secretary of State exchanged letters with Molotov concerning Korea, and there were some indications that the Russians were willing to modify their position. Arrangements were therefore made for the resumption of work by the council on May 21, in Seoul.

After what appeared to be a good start, the commission soon became bogged down in the same problems it had experienced before. The Russians insisted that those parties and individuals who had opposed the trusteeship provisions of the Moscow agreement were ineligible for consultation. On this matter, the United States would not yield. Although the U. S. delegation continued to make efforts toward some joint action, all proposals were unfavorably considered by the Russians.

On August 26, 1947, it was proposed to the Russians that the four powers who were to constitute the trusteeship powers for Korea should meet in Washington on September 8 to determine a way to implement the Moscow agreement. With this invitation, the United States submitted

a seven point proposal covering elections, the presence of UN observers, withdrawal of occupation forces, adoption of a Korean constitution, and UN assistance for public and private Korean agencies.

The invitation and proposal were totally rejected by the Russians, who insisted the Moscow agreement provided for a joint commission as the first step toward independence, and any other approach would be in violation of that agreement. Considering the total lack of success with the Russians, President Truman instructed Secretary Marshall to place the issue before the General Assembly of the United Nations, which was about to convene. Marshall asked the UN to do what the United States and Russia had failed to do--unite Korea.

On September 26, the Russians countered this move with a proposal that all occupation forces withdraw at the same time, sometime in early 1948. On the surface the offer was inviting. This was a time when U. S. commitments were many, forces were limited, and strong congressional pressure existed to reduce military spending further. With these things in mind, Truman instructed the State and Defense Departments to weigh commitments to determine if the withdrawal proposed could be accomplished safely.

After much study and consideration, it was determined that it would be most desirable to withdraw American occupation troops concurrently with the withdrawal of the Russian troops. In addition, Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer, who made a first-hand study of the situation in the summer of 1947, recommended that the U. S. provide sufficient assistance to the South Koreans to enable them to have their own defense force before American troops were withdrawn.

To formalize the proposal for withdrawal, the United States

submitted a detailed plan to the General Assembly of the United Nations. Included in the plan was a proposal that elections be held in the two zones, under UN supervision, before March 31, 1948. This was to be the first step toward a national government. It was further proposed that the government should then build up its own security, organize its government, and arrange for the withdrawal of occupation troops. To supervise the elections, the United States suggested the creation of a United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea.

It was the Russian's next move, and they charged that the United States had violated the Moscow agreement by taking the matter to the UN. They followed up the charge with a proposal to the UN that all occupation troops withdraw immediately. This resolution was defeated. The Soviet representatives then announced that if the UN commission were set up the Soviet Union would not take part in its work. The plan on Korea submitted by the United States was adopted by the General Assembly, with only the Soviet bloc abstaining. Accordingly, the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea was established and held its first meeting in Seoul on January 12, 1948. Although the Russian commander in North Korea would not allow the Commission to enter the northern zone, it was able to carry out its operations successfully in the south. In spite of the Communist efforts to sabotage the election in the south, four out of five eligible Koreans registered to vote and over ninety percent of those registered did vote.

On May 31, 1948, the National Assembly met for the first time and chose Mr. Syngman Rhee as chairman. By July 12, the new constitution had been completed, and by July 17, it was promulgated. Three days

later, the National Assembly elected Syngman Rhee President of the Republic of Korea. And on August 15, 1948, climaxing the change, the American military government came to an end and the Republic of Korea was formally proclaimed.

In North Korea the Soviet authorities countered by establishing a "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" on September 9. Some ten days later, the Soviet Foreign Office advised the U. S. embassy in Moscow that all Soviet occupation forces would be out of Korea by the end of December 1948.

According to President Truman he was very much for withdrawing American troops from Korea, but knew the Russians had built up the North Korean army. It was estimated that South Korea could only survive as long as it received considerable aid from the United States. It was on this basis that the President approved, in the spring of 1948, a recommendation by the Security Council that the U. S. extend aid to the Korean government for training and equipping security forces and for providing extensive economic help.

In early February, 1949, General MacArthur expressed his opinion to the Secretary of the Army that he favored prompt withdrawal of American troops from Korea. By March, MacArthur reported that the training and combat readiness of the Korean security forces had reached such a level that complete withdrawal of American troops was justified and would not adversely affect the U. S. position in the Pacific. At that time, the South Koreans had an army of approximately 65,000 men aided by an American advisory group of 500 officers and men. By June 29, 1949, all U. S. troops, except for the advisory group left Korea.⁷

The period following the withdrawal of American and Russian troops

was an uneasy time for Korea. North Korea proceeded to harass the South with border raids and disturbances, and propaganda campaigns. The northern regime, headed by Kim Il Sung, became so bold and hostile that it sent a letter to the United Nations announcing its intention to unite Korea by force.⁸

Although intelligence reports from Korea in the spring of 1950 indicated a continued build up of North Korean forces and continuing guerrilla raids into the south, there was no indication as to whether an attack was certain or when it was likely to happen. According to President Truman this situation "did not apply alone to Korea . . . There were any number of other spots in the world where the Russians had the capability to attack."⁹

Little did the United States know that these limited attacks from the north foreshadowed the invasion of the Republic of Korea.¹⁰

The Anatomy of a Decision

Saturday, June 24, 1950 was not a time when America's top foreign-policy men were eagerly awaiting the newest development on the international scene. The President was in Independence, Missouri, enjoying a weekend with his family. The Secretary of State was at his farm in Sandy Spring, Maryland. The United States Representative to the United Nations, Warren Austin, was leisurely attending to his apple orchard near Burlington, Vermont. And Austin's deputy, Ernest Gross, was involved with his teen-aged daughter's party, which included some twenty of her girl friends, in the cool of their Manhasset, Long Island home

That evening W. Bradley Connors, the Officer in Charge of Public Affairs for the State Department's Far Eastern Bureau, was relaxing with his family in their Washington apartment. Shortly after 8:00 P.M., Connors

received a telephone call from Donald Gonzales of the United Press, asking if the State Department could confirm reports received by UP from their man in Korea indicating a large-scale North Korean attack on South Korea (the Republic of Korea). Connors, having no such information at the time, tried to call the American Embassy in Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, but it was early Sunday morning there and the overseas circuits to Korea were closed. Connors then rushed to the State Department and found an official cable from John J. Muccio, the American Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, which said: "North Korean forces invaded Republic of Korea territory at several places this morning . . . It would appear from the nature of the attack and the manner in which it was launched that it constitutes an all-out offensive against the Republic of Korea."¹¹

A little after ten o'clock that evening, while the Trumans were sitting in the library of their home in Independence, Missouri, the phone rang. The call was from Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State. "Mr. President," he said, "I have very serious news. The North Koreans have invaded South Korea."¹²

The President's first reaction was to get back to Washington immediately, but after learning that much of the details concerning Korea were not yet available, Acheson persuaded him to remain in Independence. Acheson advised the President that he would call as soon as other reports made the situation more clear. He suggested to the President in the meantime, that the United Nations Security Council should be asked to hold a meeting at once and declare that an act of aggression had been committed against the Republic of Korea. The President agreed with his recommendation.

Acheson's next call came at around eleven-thirty the following morning, just as the Trumans were about to sit down to an early Sunday dinner. In his conversation with the President, Acheson reported that the United Nations Security Council had been called into emergency session, and that recent reports from Korea indicated an all-out invasion was under way. He stated that the Security Council would probably call for a cease-fire, but it was his view that the North Koreans would completely disregard the UN request, just as they had done in the past. As Truman began to create a clear picture in his mind of the situation, it became obvious to him that some decision would have to be made at once concerning the degree of support the United States was willing to extend to the Republic of Korea. The President instructed Acheson to get together with the Service Secretaries and the Chiefs of Staff and start working on their recommendations. Truman then advised Acheson that he was returning to Washington at once.

Once Truman made his decision to return to Washington, he wasted no time. He advised the crew of the presidential plane Independence that he wanted to depart as soon as possible, and in less than an hour, the plane was ready. The President's departure was so rapid that two of his aides were left behind.

Truman departed Kansas City Municipal Airport at two o'clock, and the flight back to Washington took just over three hours. According to Truman's account of the flight, it gave him an opportunity to think about the implications of the North Korean's actions. He recalled that this was not the first time a strong nation had invaded a weak nation, and he remembered "how each time the democracies failed to act it had encouraged the aggressors to keep going ahead."¹³ Truman felt that,

"Communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier."¹⁴

The significance of this event must have weighed heavily on Truman's mind. Being a devoted student of history, it was his belief that the proper response to this situation could be found in lessons of the past. And he must have realized that his handling of this problem was certain to have profound consequences.

The situation in Korea during the past year had been far from uneventful. The North Koreans had made numerous raids into the South, sometimes with as many as 1,500 men. However, Korea was certainly not the only spot in the world where trouble was likely to come. At the time of the Korean invasion, large Bulgarian and Rumanian armies were massed on the border of Yugoslavia, which had broken with Stalin the previous year and asked for support from the United States. A large Soviet garrison was stationed in East Germany. And powerful Russian forces located just across the border were threatening Iran and Turkey. Truman feared that the Korean incident might well be "the opening round of World War III."¹⁵

Of vital concern to President Truman was the status of the United Nations, which, in two days, was to celebrate its fifth birthday. "It was also clear to me," Truman said, "that the foundations and the principles of the United Nations were at stake unless this unprovoked attack on Korea could be stopped."¹⁶ Even before the presidential plane landed in Washington, Truman knew of the passage of the UN resolution denouncing North Korea's act of aggression. When the Security Council assembled at 2 20 P.M. Sunday, one chair was glaringly vacant. It was the chair of the Soviet representative who had been boycotting the council for five months because of its refusal to replace the Nationalist Chinese delegation with a representative of Red China.

With the Russian representative missing, the resolution denouncing North Korea's aggression against the South was adopted by a vote of nine to nothing.¹⁷ This meant that the prestige and authority of the United Nations "was on the line."¹⁸

When Truman landed in Washington, Secretary of State Acheson was waiting at the airport, as was Secretary of Defense Johnson. The group hurried to Blair House, where on Truman's orders an emergency dinner conference had been called. They were joined by the three Service Secretaries, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, top representatives of the State Department, and Ambassador-at-Large Philip Jessup. Since it was already late, everyone went at once to the dining room for dinner. Truman instructed the group that no discussion would take place until dinner was served and the Blair House staff had withdrawn.

At the beginning of the conference, Dean Acheson was called on by Truman to provide the group with a detailed picture of the situation in Korea. In response, Acheson began by reading the first report received by the State Department from the U. S. Ambassador in Seoul, Korea, the preceding evening:

According to Korean army reports which partly confirmed by KMAG field advisor reports North Korean forces invaded ROK territory at several points this morning. Action was initiated about 4 A.M. Ongjin blasted by North Korean artillery fire. About 6 A.M. North Korean infantry commenced crossing parallel in Ongjin area, Kaesong area, Chunchon area and amphibious landing was reportedly made south of Kangnung on east coast. Kaesong was reportedly captured at 9 A.M., with some 10 North Korean tanks participating in operation. North Korean forces, spear-headed by tanks, reportedly closing in on Chunchon. Details of fighting in Kangnung are unclear, although it seems North Korean forces have cut highway Am conferring with KMAG advisors and Korean officials this morning re situation.

It would appear from nature of attack and manner in which it was launched that it constitutes all out offensive against ROK.

There were additional messages from Ambassador Muccio, but all confirmed that a full-fledged attack was underway. The North Koreans had even been so bold as to broadcast a proclamation that was essentially a declaration of war.

Acheson then presented the following recommendations which the State and Defense Departments had prepared:

1. Americans--including dependents of the Military Mission--should be evacuated; to accomplish evacuation, Kimp'o and other airports should be kept open. In doing this, MacArthur should keep his air forces south of the 38th parallel.
2. MacArthur should be instructed to provide ammunition and supplies to the Korean army.
3. The Seventh Fleet should be ordered from Cavite to the Formosa Strait to prevent the conflict from spreading to that area. The United States should make a statement to the effect that the Seventh Fleet would repel any attack on Formosa and that no attacks should be made from Formosa on the mainland.

After hearing these recommendations, Truman asked each person in turn to express his agreement or disagreement and his personal views. From this discussion, two very apparent attitudes emerged. One, according to Truman, was the "complete, almost unspoken acceptance on the part of everyone that whatever had to be done to meet this aggression had to be done."²⁰ The Navy and the Air Force thought air and naval aid might be sufficient, but General Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, felt that if the Korean army was really broken, ground forces would be required.²¹

Throughout the conference, the President continued his usual practice of listening to the opinions of his advisers before expressing

his own. It soon became obvious, however, that Truman's thinking on the plane to Washington had carried him beyond that of his advisers. While his advisers had obviously become bogged in details, Truman had been looking at the situation in a much broader context. Although each adviser was given the opportunity to express his views, Truman was the obvious leader. Everyone knew when the talking was over it would be up to the President to make the decisions. Truman was grim and decisive in his manner and his thinking. He soon made his attitude perfectly clear that past policy was, indeed, past. The time had come to respond with boldness. Truman emphasized that the world-wide Communist threat was getting out of hand, and the situation in the Far East was deteriorating to the point where the national security of the United States, the future effectiveness of the UN, and the ability to avoid World War III were gravely endangered ²²

Truman then directed that orders be issued putting Acheson's three recommendations into immediate effect. Although the question of using American ground forces was raised at the conference, no decision was made. Truman decided that the only way to settle the momentous question was to get the facts. He told General Collins to have MacArthur send a survey party to South Korea immediately. He also ordered the preparation of orders for 80,000 men on duty in Japan, so they could move swiftly if MacArthur's survey party determined the only way to stop the Communist thrust was by introducing American combat troops. Truman obviously realized that once American combat troops were committed, all lesser options were gone. And being a student of history he must have realized that a commitment of this type, once made, tends only to increase.

It had been less than thirty hours since the members of the

Truman Administration first received reports of the attack in Korea, and little more than twelve hours since it was determined that the attack was a serious aggression. Rarely had any government reacted so positively and swiftly to a crisis thousands of miles away.²³

Options are Reduced

On Monday, June 27, reports from the battlefield began to sound progressively worse, and one of the messages that arrived was from Syngman Rhee asking for help.

Beginning in early morning 25 June, North Korean Communist Army began armed aggression against South. Your Excellency and Congress of US already aware of fact that our people, anticipating incident such as today's established strong national defense force in order to secure bulwark of democracy in the east and to render service to world peace. We again thank you for your indispensable aid in liberating us and in establishing our Republic. As we face this national crisis, putting up brave fight, we appeal for your increasing support and ask that you at the same time extend effective and timely aid in order to prevent this act of destruction of world peace.²⁴

With the situation becoming more and more alarming, Truman called another emergency meeting at Blair House for Monday night. MacArthur's latest message provided no basis for optimism. It said in part: "South Korean units unable to resist determined Northern offensive. Contributory factor exclusive enemy possession of tanks and fighter planes . . . Our estimate is that a complete collapse is imminent."²⁵ Enemy tanks were outside Seoul, the United States Air Force was already fighting over Korea, and in the past twenty-four hours three Russian-built Yak aircraft had been shot down during an attempt to strafe a Danish ship evacuating American dependents from Inchon.²⁶ Secretary of State Acheson again presented the joint recommendations of the State and Defense Departments. The main proposal was that the United States Navy and Air Force should be ordered to provide cover and support for the South Korean armies. Acheson repeated

a previous recommendation that the Seventh Fleet should neutralize the island of Formosa. He added that the United Nations Security Council would meet the following day and that the United States would seek a resolution calling on members of the UN to give armed support to South Korea. During the ensuing discussion, no one raised any significant objections to the proposals. Truman approved the recommendations on the spot, to include strengthening United States forces in the Philippines and increasing aid to the French in Indo-China. The conference ended forty minutes after it began.²⁷

Truman was still hoping to avoid the use of American ground troops in Korea. He hoped that the additional air and naval support might boost the fighting spirit of the battered South Korean army and stall the North Korean advance sufficiently to permit the South Koreans to regroup. Truman, too, needed a chance to regroup, since his next task was to persuade Congress to support his decisions. When the conference was over and his advisers departed, Truman told George Elsey and Charles Murphy to round up a meeting of congressional leaders for the following morning.²⁸

Sunday and Monday had left many observers with the feeling that another Munich was in the offing. In Washington and around the world, diplomats, politicians, and average citizens were anxiously waiting to see what the United States was going to do about Korea. One Washington ambassador cabled his government saying: "The time has come when Uncle Sam must put up or shut up and my guess is he will do neither."²⁹

At 11:30 A.M., Tuesday, Truman met with fifteen congressional leaders in the Cabinet Room. After the President shook hands with each of them, Dean Acheson briefed them on what was happening in Korea and what had already been done. He pointed out that it was vital for the

United States to adopt a firm stand because the South Korean forces were weakening fast; moreover, the leadership of many Western European nations seemed to be in a state of panic as they watched to see if the United States would act or not. During Acheson's briefing, he failed to mention the role of the United States in the UN. Truman, however, noted this as the most important element of the situation. After the President read the statement he was going to release to the press after the meeting, he added some very significant remarks. He stated that the act was obviously inspired by the Soviet Union, and, if the United States let Korea down, the Soviets would swallow one piece of Asia after another. Truman was convinced that the situation in Korea had long-range implications and "If Asia went, the Near East would collapse and Europe would inevitably follow."³⁰

After the congressional leaders posed several concerned questions, and had received rather candid answers, Senator Tom Connally summed up congressional opinion when he said that it was apparent that this was "the clearest test case that the United Nations has ever, ever faced. If the United Nations is ever going to do anything, this is the time, and if the United Nations cannot bring the crisis in Korea to an end, then we might just as well wash up the United Nations and forget it."³¹ To this Truman nodded and vowed he was going to make absolutely certain that everything the United States did in Korea would be consistent with the decision made by the UN Security Council.

The Secretary of State then turned to a discussion of the role of the Soviet Union in regard to Korea. He pointed out that the President had specifically used the word Communism instead of Russia in his press statement to leave the door open for the Soviet Union to

back down without losing too much prestige. And continuing in this vein, he asked the members of Congress not to condemn the Russians specifically for the Korean crisis.³²

On Tuesday morning, June 27, rumor began to spread around Washington that the President would announce the pledge of American arms to the defense of South Korea. At 12:30 P.M., the official statement was released. The reaction to the President's decision was described by the Christian Science Monitor's Joseph C. Harsch in the following terms:

I have lived and worked in and out of this city for 20 years. Never before in that time have I felt such a sense of relief and unity pass through this city.

The most curious thing about the affair was the June 27 gloom from the belief that the administration would miss the boat and do something idle or specious. The decision to act already had been taken, yet almost everyone was assuming there would be no action. When it came there was a sense first of astonishment and then of relief. Mr. Truman obviously did much more than he was expected to do, and almost exactly what most individuals seemed to wish he would do. I have never seen such a large part of Washington so nearly satisfied with a decision of the government.³³

When the President's statement was read in the House of Representatives, the whole chamber rose cheering except for Vito Marcantonio of New York, a long time fellow traveler of the Communist Party.

After the statement had been read, a few Republicans asked irritably if the President had taken upon himself the power to declare war. While criticisms were being made and answers attempted, Senator William Knowland of California, a rising figure in the Taft group, interrupted to say "I believe that in the very important steps the President of the United States has taken to uphold the hands of the United Nations and the free peoples of the world, he

should have the overwhelming support of all Americans regardless of their party affiliation."³⁴ With this, both sides of the Senate broke into a loud sustained applause.

That night at 10:45 P.M., the United Nations Security Council again met, with the Russians absent, and passed another resolution calling for member nations to "render such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and restore international peace and security to the area."³⁵

Wednesday was a day for good news. Averell Harriman, just back from Europe, told Truman of his firsthand knowledge of the feeling of relief that swept through Europe's capitals when it was learned that the United States was taking a firm stand in Korea. Encouraging news also came from Ambassador Muccio in Seoul, who sent the following message:

Situation had deteriorated so rapidly had not President's decision plus arrival General Church party [head of MacArthur's survey team] become known here it is doubtful any organized Korean resistance would have continued through night. Combat aid decision plus Church's order have had great morale effect. Forthcoming air strikes hoped demoralize enemy, make possible reform Korean army south bank of Han River.³⁶

Telegrams and letters flooded the White House running ten-to-one in favor of the President's action. Truman was especially pleased to receive a wire from Thomas Dewey, his 1948 presidential opponent, which read: "I wholeheartedly agree with and support the difficult decision you have made."³⁷

The Decision is to Fight

Even with the United Nations backing the President and the American people cheering his decisions, it would have been completely out of character for the opposition party not to be opposing something

or someone. It wasn't until Wednesday that Robert A. Taft, Mr. Republican, took the Senate floor. Taft accused the Truman Administration of inviting the North Korean attack by permitting Korea to remain divided. He singled out for special criticism a speech given by the Secretary of State earlier in 1950, in which he said that Korea lay outside the United States' perimeter of defense in the Pacific. It was obvious from Taft's speech that his primary target was not the decisions of the Truman Administration, but the Secretary of State. "The President's statement of policy [on Tuesday] represents a complete change in the programs and policies heretofore proclaimed by the Administration," said Taft, and "any Secretary of State who has been so reversed by his superiors and whose policies have precipitated the danger of war, had better resign or let someone else administer the program to which he was, and perhaps still is, so violently opposed."³⁸

Although Taft questioned the President's authority to engage the nation in armed intervention and attacked the Secretary of State, this was only one phase of his speech. Throughout the remainder of his speech, he made it clear that he approved of the general policies outlined in the President's statement. The tenor of Taft's speech was so unusually "pro-administration" that Charles Ross, Truman's press secretary, responded with: "My God! Bob Taft has joined the UN and the U. S."³⁹

On Thursday, the news from the Korean battlefield turned sour. General MacArthur's headquarters reported to the Pentagon that the South Korean casualties were approximately fifty percent and that there was little hope of forming a line at the Han River, south of Seoul. Then came a telegram from the U. S. Ambassador in Moscow.

The message was in response to Truman's order on June 27 to ask the Russian government to "use its influence with the North Korean authorities to withdraw their invading forces immediately."⁴⁰

Soviet Foreign Secretary Andrei Gromyko read the grim reply.

1. In accordance with facts verified by the Soviet Government, the events taking place in Korea were provoked by an attack of forces from the South Korean authorities on the border regions of North Korea. Therefore the responsibility for these events rests upon the South Korean authorities and upon those who stand behind their back.

2. As is known, the Soviet Government withdrew its troops from Korea earlier than the Government of the United States and thereby confirmed its traditional principle of noninterference by foreign powers in the internal affairs of Korea.⁴¹

By late morning, Secretary of Defense Johnson was on the phone to the White House, urging another high-level conference, which Truman set for 5:00 P.M.

At 4:00 P.M., the President held his first press conference since the Korean attack. The reporters had many questions about Korea, but Truman obviously was unwilling to go on record prematurely concerning most of them. He did, however, say that the United States was not at war and agreed with the description given the U. S. action by one reporter who called it "a police action under the United Nations."⁴²

After the press conference, the President went to the White House for the five o'clock meeting with his advisers. The group consisted of the men who had attended the Sunday and Monday meetings and some additions, including the Republican advisor to the State Department, John Foster Dulles, who had recently returned from Korea, and Averell Harriman, chief of American economic activities in Europe, who had just returned from Paris the day before. The conference opened with the Secretary of State giving a review of the military situation in Korea and pointing out specifically that American naval and air aid

were not turning the tide of battle as had been hoped. Secretary of Defense Johnson then read a proposed directive prepared earlier by the Defense Department and concurred in by the State Department, which would authorize General MacArthur to use American service troops (non-combat) throughout Korea. These service troops were mostly signal corps and transportation units. The proposed directive stipulated the use of American combat troops to protect the port and airfield at Pusan. American ships and planes were allowed to expand their operations to include military targets in North Korea. American combat troops, however, were not authorized for use in the combat area, some two hundred miles north of Pusan.

The suggestion to use American ground troops anywhere in Korea caused the President to hesitate. During the ensuing discussion the Secretary of Defense contributed to the group the Soviet reply to the American request that Russia use its influence to bring about a cease fire. The primary significance of the message was not, according to Acheson, the fact that Russia had refused to help, but that the message suggested no plan for direct Russian military intervention. This evaluation helped remove some of the President's reluctance to use American ground troops and the strong unified urging by his military advisers removed the rest.

That evening Acheson returned to the White House with a message from Chiang Kai-shek, offering up to 33,000 Chinese Nationalist troops. Chiang advised, however, that he would require American naval and air units to transport and supply his troops. The President's initial response was to accept the offer, since it provided an option that would reduce the need for American troops. Acheson was opposed to

the idea. He argued that the Chinese Nationalist troops would require considerable re-equipping before they could be used in combat, and that it didn't make sense for the United States to protect Formosa and send Nationalist troops to fight elsewhere. Truman still had some reservations about the matter and asked Acheson to bring it up again at the Friday-morning conference.⁴³

According to Truman, he was still inclined to accept the Chinese offer the following morning. When Frank Pace, the Secretary of the Army, called at 5:00 A.M., Truman was already up. Pace told the President that he had received information from General MacArthur, who had just completed a trip to the Korean front line, that he was convinced that only American ground units could stop the North Korean advance. MacArthur had asked for permission to commit one regimental combat team immediately and to build up to two divisions as rapidly as possible. The President told Pace to inform MacArthur immediately that the use of the regimental combat team was approved. On the question of two divisions, the President promised an answer in a few hours.

After hearing the seven o'clock briefing from the Joint Chiefs of Staff's representative, Truman called the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Army and told them to be prepared to discuss at an eight-thirty meeting MacArthur's request for authority to commit the two divisions and the offer of troops by Chiang Kai-shek.

At the conference, Truman raised the question whether it would be wise to accept the troops offered by Chiang, but he found little support. Acheson continued his opposition presented previously and added that the use of Nationalist troops might provoke the Chinese Reds to enter the fighting to inflict damage on the Generalissimo's troops. The Chiefs of

Staff pointed out that the troops offered by the Chinese would have very few modern weapons and equipment and would be virtually as helpless as the South Korean army. Furthermore, the transportation required by the Chinese would be more profitably used by being assigned to carry American soldiers and supplies.

Also during the conference, Truman stressed that he did not want the group to lock their attention solely on Korea and fail to give the matter a contextual evaluation. He posed such questions as: What is Mao Tse-tung planning? How might the Russians react in the Balkans, Germany, or Iran?

At the close of the conference, the President was still concerned with the ability of the limited U S. troops available to stand off the enemy, but after further discussion, he agreed that the Chinese offer of troops should be declined. Truman then decided to give MacArthur full authority to use the ground forces under his command, which included all combat troops he could spare from Japan. At the suggestion of Admiral Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations, a second order was added a naval blockade of the Korean coast. At 1:22 P.M. on Friday, June 30, the orders left Washington which put the United States irrevocably in the war.⁴⁴

Footnotes

¹Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy & Rhetoric, I (Jan. 1968), p. 6.

²Ronald J. Caridi, The Korean War and American Politics (Philadelphia University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp 22-23

³Robert T. Oliver, Why War Came in Korea (New York Fordham University Press, 1950), pp 38-43

⁴Memoirs, II, 316-317

- ⁵Ibid
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Ibid., pp. 317-329.
- ⁸Caridi, pp. 24-25
- ⁹Memoirs, II, 331
- ¹⁰Caridi, p. 25
- ¹¹Eric F. Goldman, The Crucial Decade (New York. Vintage Books, 1960), pp. 145-146.
- ¹²Memoirs, II, 332.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 333.
- ¹⁴Ibid., pp. 332-333.
- ¹⁵Margaret Truman, Harry S. Truman (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1973), p. 458.
- ¹⁶Memoirs, II, 333.
- ¹⁷Goldman, p. 149
- ¹⁸M. Truman, p. 458.
- ¹⁹Memoirs, II, 333-334.
- ²⁰Ibid., pp. 334-335.
- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²Goldman, p. 155.
- ²³M. Truman, pp. 460-461.
- ²⁴Memoirs, II, 336.
- ²⁵M. Truman, p. 462.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Goldman, p 156.
- ²⁸M. Truman, p. 462
- ²⁹Ibid , p. 463
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 464

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Christian Science Monitor, June 29, 1950, p. 1

³⁴Goldman, p. 158.

³⁵M. Truman, p. 465.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Goldman, p. 158.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 163-164.

³⁹Ibid., p. 164.

⁴⁰M. Truman, p. 466.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Goldman, pp. 165-167

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 168-170.

CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF MESSAGE PROPERTIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

"The political orator," as Aristotle maintained, "aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action"¹ Truman was doubtlessly well aware of that truth when on July 19, 1950, and again, about six weeks later, on September 1, he went before the American people to explain and defend the decisions he had made about the Korean Conflict. It is the purpose of this chapter to analyze those national addresses from two perspectives: (1) the value-propositions or justificatory arguments Truman presented, and (2) the strategic appeals he employed.

The methodology used in the critical analysis of Truman's addresses is derived primarily from the writings of Kenneth Burke. In A Rhetoric of Motives, Burke discusses the concept of identification as it relates to rhetoric--the art of persuasion. He maintains that language originated because of man's condition of separateness from his fellows and his need for cooperation. Burke explains that "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so"² Burke further explains that it is "clearly a matter of rhetoric to persuade a man by identifying your cause with his interest."³

Working from this Burkean orientation suggested the diagram as a useful analytic tool in examining Truman's speeches. In application, this diagram exposes the probable immediate relationship between the identifier Truman used and the audiences he addressed. Identifiers which have the effect of supporting an audience's immediate interests are assigned a Positive Value. Identifiers conflicting with the immediate interests of a given audience are assigned a Negative Value.

Truman's July 19th Address

Truman's first national address was delivered from the White House at 10:30 P.M. EST. The following represents the analytical diagram just described

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
1. Communist forces used armed aggression against South Korea.	USSR*	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
2. Aggression in Korea threat to all free-world nations.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
3. Aggression in Korea demonstrates Communist's unwillingness to work cooperatively in world community.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
4. Aggression in Korea is threat to world community of free nations.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
5. The challenge of aggression must be met with firmness.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
6. Nature of invasion shows long planning.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
7. Invaders ignored UN request for cease-fire and withdrawal.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos

*USSR means not only Russia, but the entire Communist world generally accepted at the time as being dominated by Russia.

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
8. UN recommended that members help restore peace and repel attack	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
9. Fifty-two of fifty-nine UN members support UN recommendation	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
10. History shows appeasement in the face of aggression leads to war.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
11. At stake in Korea is US security and world peace.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
12. Other UN member nations are sending forces to Korea.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
13. UN forces are under command of General MacArthur.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
14. Prompt UN action landmark of rule of law.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
15. Russia has failed to endorse efforts to stop war.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
16. Russia refused to use influence to stop fighting before UN action.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
17. Russia has espoused desire for peace but supports aggression.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
18. US will continue to support UN action to restore peace.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
19. The fight in Korea will be hard and tough.	USSR US Allies	Neg Neg Neg
20. Invaders are well equipped and supplied.	USSR US Allies	Neg Neg Neg

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
21. Korean defenders making brave fight.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
22. Our forces have fought well and reinforcements are arriving.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
23. Reports from Generals Collins and MacArthur.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
24. Reports are reassuring but show task in Korea will be difficult.	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Neg
25. Similar acts of aggression may happen in other parts of world.	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Neg
26. Free nations must be on guard against sneak attack.	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Neg
27. Free nations must build beyond the requirements of Korea	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
28. Situation in Korea will require men, equipment, and supplies	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
29. Increases in armed forces will come from volunteers, Selective Service, and National Guard and Reserves	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Pos
30. The cost of military expansion as presently envisaged is ten billion dollars.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
31. Common defense among free nations is best hope for peace	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
32. The US is rich and productive.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
33. Some resources for defense will have to come from civilian uses	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Pos

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
34. Installment buying will have to be limited.	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Pos
35. Credit will have to be restrained	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Pos
36. Defense needs will bring about substantial tax increases.	USSR	Neg
	US	Neg
	Allies	Pos
37. Defense will require increased production.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
38. Military needs are large--hard work needed.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
39. Hoarding, especially food, is foolish.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
40. If there was danger of shortages, controls would be instituted.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
41. The US has resources sufficient to meet needs.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
42. The US is willing and able to pay the price for freedom.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
43. The US is the leader of the free-world community.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
44. The US believes in freedom and peace for all men	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
45. Our Creator intended that men be free and at peace.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos

As Burke reminds us, "You persuade a man only in so far as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude,

idea, identifying your ways with his."⁵ Since Truman was concerned with essentially three audiences (the Communists - USSR, the American public - US, and other free nations of the world - Allies), the effect of each identifier may differ from one audience to another.

Robert T. Oliver, in The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, argues that "the persuasive speaker needs to learn . . . to look through and around the differences to the more fundamental and meaningful factors of identification."⁶ Hence, Truman's problem involved matching and managing several series of relationships between ideas and audiences.

Truman begins his July 19 address by identifying the invasion of South Korea with the security of the United States, the other free nations of the world, and with world peace in general. There are obviously many levels at which identification is possible between people and between nations. Nations can identify in the areas of trade, defense, background, etc. However, there seems to be no level of identification more fundamental to a nation or individual than that of security. The US and Russia had experienced long, a lack of identification concerning Korea except in a negative sense. When North Korea invaded South Korea, this represented a negative identification in a most fundamental sense.

When Truman declared that the invasion of South Korea represented a threat to all free nations of the world, he essentially states to the world the level and form of identification created by the situation in Korea. Although important to his American audience, in a technical sense it was much more important to the Communists. Only by knowing the perception of importance (level of identification) assigned to the invasion by the United States and other free nations could the Communists evaluate their position in terms of free-world response.

The importance of recognizing the level of identification appears significant if one is to understand why Truman uses negative identifiers exclusively in terms of the Communist audience. This would suggest that Truman felt the situation was either beyond the point of effectively using positive identifiers, or that by so doing, he would not be speaking their language. In any case it would seem that Truman's use of negative identifiers with regard to the Communist audience is in keeping with Burke's idea of identifying "your ways with his" and with Oliver's conclusion that identification can be found at a "fundamental" level even when higher levels of identification can't be achieved.

Identifiers used with regard to other free nations (Allies) represent, as would be expected, almost a complete turn around from the negative approach concerning the Communists. Every negative identifier associated with the Communists would likely be positively identified with by the Allies, every positive identifier used with regard to the American audience would likely be perceived as positive, and even negative identifiers used with regard to the American audience shows some positive implications concerning the Allies. For example, identifiers thirty-three through thirty-six, concerning credit, restrictions, and taxes, which would negatively identify with the American audience, would have the probable immediate effect on allied nations of demonstrating support and determination.

Although the identifiers used in terms of effect on the American audience were mostly positive, the number of negative identifiers used suggests they were used to demonstrate determination to the Communists rather than explaining how things were going to be in the future for the American public. This interpretation certainly does not rule out

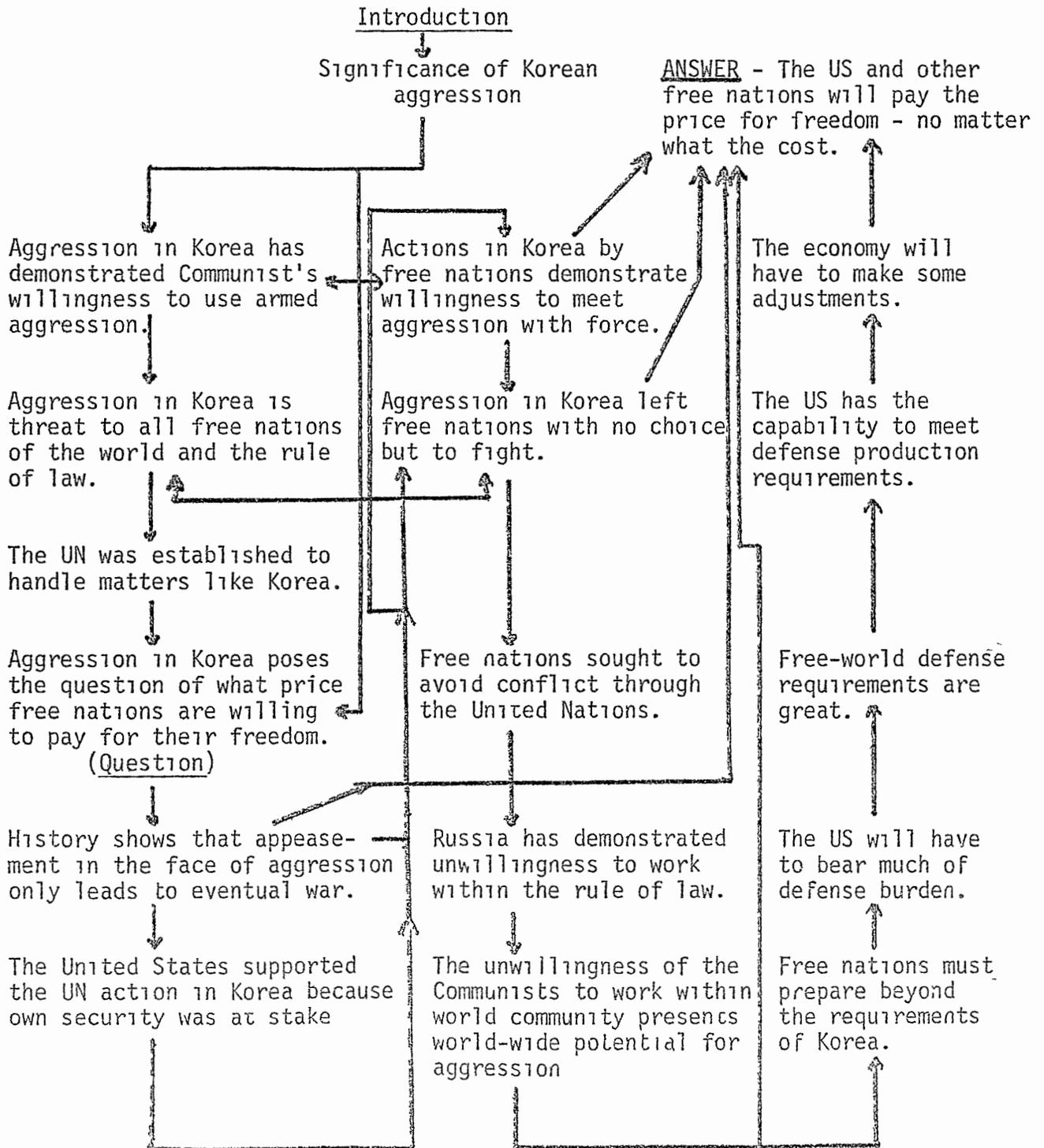
the possibility that Truman felt the need to soften the blow of the war on the economy by placing the requirements of the war within the context not only of should, but of can and must. Robert Oliver says that "the persuasive speaker chooses for his audience the kinds of facts, and presents them in such a manner as he believes will do them the most good."⁷ Truman's problem was that he had several audiences with conflicting needs.

In addition to the function of identification, Burke says that a speech provides the answers to the questions posed by the total situation in which the speaker finds himself.⁸ Burke continues by saying that in answering the questions, the answers given in a speech are more than just answers, "they are strategic answers, stylized answers."⁹ These answers "size up" the situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and made them in such a way that contains an attitude towards them."¹⁰ Based on the assumption that the propositions contained in a speech are not presented by chance but by strategic arrangement representative of the inductive "sizing up" of the situation by the speaker, it would seem that an analysis of speech strategies would reveal much about the speech and the speaker. Truman's strategic arrangement is represented on the following page by Figure 1.

Within the framework of the strategic alignment of Truman's first national address, he first sets about to answer the question of what the Korean invasion meant in terms of the United States and the free-world in general. After making the statement that the invasion posed a threat to all free nations, he proceeds to offer propositions to support his conclusion. He discusses the invasion in terms of the rule of law and the United Nations. He then presents a brief history of Korea following

Figure 1

A STRATEGY REPRESENTATION OF TRUMAN'S JULY 19TH ADDRESS



World War II and how the triangular relationship between Korea, the Soviet Union, and the United States came about. He describes the activities of the United Nations with regard to Korea in an apparent attempt to show objectivity on the part of the United States in dealing with Korea. And finally, he gives evidence that the invasion was totally without provocation from South Korea but planned and supported in such a way as to demonstrate long preparation on the part of the Communists.

Truman then returns to the matter of the United Nations and its part in dealing with the Korean crisis. Having spent the preceding five years working to establish the United Nations as a body to handle national differences in a democratic way, Truman obviously knew there would be little or no need to argue for the rule of law in the future if the United States and other free nations operated outside the rule of law concerning Korea. In other words, the situation in Korea, as perceived by Truman, represented a test of the United Nations and its ability to carry out the rule of law.

In describing the actions taken by the UN members, Truman appears to be intimating the primary question posed by the aggression, "What price is the free-world willing to pay for freedom?" In answering this question, he reports the overwhelming UN response (fifty-two of fifty-nine members) to restore peace in Korea.

It is interesting to note how Truman uses certain propositions to cross-reinforce certain other propositions. For instance, he suggests that the United States supported the UN decision concerning Korea because it was threatened by the Korean aggression and had no choice but to fight. Supporting the proposition of "no choice but to fight," he recalls that

appeasement in the 1930's lead to general war. In answering the implied question of "What price freedom?" Truman suggests that the response already made by the UN member nations demonstrate conclusively the value placed on freedom by free nations.

Another question Truman suggests through his alignment of propositions is, "What is the significance of Korea beyond Korea?" In answering this question he discusses the unwillingness of the Soviet Union to work with or within the UN, the Soviet Union's unwillingness to use its influence to halt the aggression in Korea, and the ominous threat presented by the Communist's demonstrated willingness to use armed aggression.

At this point in Truman's speech, he sets forth a multi-faceted rationale that the aggression in Korea posed a threat to all free nations and to world peace, that the United Nations was the organization to handle the matter, that the free-world had no choice but to meet force with force, and that the willingness of the Communists to use armed aggression posed a world-wide problem. With these claims admitted in evidence, he then moved to the specific requirements demanded by the situation not only in Korea but throughout the world. He discusses the need for cooperation and mutual defense among free nations. At this point in the speech, Truman counters virtually every negative aspect of the Korean situation with a positive US/free-world oriented rationale. It is at this point that Truman's strategy takes an interesting turn that strongly suggests his concern with bringing about some coordination with the Soviet Union in terms of expectations. By innumerating the hardships the American people were willing to bear, Truman achieves the effect of demonstrating determination to the Communists (negative value), while, at the same time, producing a negative identification with the American people. Truman does little to

soften the impact of the hardships other than to say that the United States has a "rich and productive economy" and "the resources" to meet the needs.¹¹

Before answering the most central question suggested by the strategic alignment of propositions within the speech, that of what price freedom, Truman counters existing Soviet reports of internal division in America by stating that "the American people are unified in their belief in democratic freedom . . . [and] . . . in detesting Communist slavery."¹² This prefacing of the central answer certainly adds force to the statement that Americans "are determined to preserve [their] . . . freedom--no matter the cost."¹³

Having answered the central question and lesser questions relating to it, Truman ends his address by placing the whole matter within a moral context. Adding to the propositions of "appeasement leads to war" and "free nations were forced to fight," Truman ends with the proposition that the "Creator intended" all men to live in freedom and peace. The obvious extension to this proposition is that all men of God must unite against the immorality of aggression.

In terms of the American public and American allies, the response to Truman's address and to his other actions concerning Korea was generally favorable. Although the American public seemed fearful of the war, the feeling also existed that prosperity would follow. In the words of Elmo Roper of Fortune: "People seemed to assume that while war news might mean years of personal worry and suffering, it also probably meant that they would soon be in the midst of a wartime prosperity." Roper continues by saying that although "these thoughts gave the people's outlook an optimistic tinge in the first days of the war," had they

taken into full account the burdens war would bring--rationing, higher taxes, allocations, and controls--perhaps their mood might have changed.¹⁴

After the initial surge of approval of the administration's handling of the Communist aggression in Korea began to fade, even the action they supported began to seem flawed in the eyes of Truman's opponents. Republicans found much appeal to popular opinion in accusing the administration, and specifically Secretary of State Acheson, of inviting the attack. Administration critics assured the public that by stating on January 12 that Korea and Formosa were outside the American defense perimeter, Acheson had given the Communists a guarantee of immunity.

Much of President Truman's decline in popularity, first observable around the beginning of August, can be attributed to State Department related problems. Nevertheless, there were certainly other contributory causes: dislike of the Korean War, fear of renewed wartime restrictions, rising inflation, growing power of labor unions, etc. The dislike of the Korean War involved more than just the dislike of fighting; it involved not liking the limited aspect of fighting. The American people had always fought to win, to defeat the aggressor. The Korean War was different and the people resented not adhering to precedent. In discussing the effect of precedent, Thomas C. Shelling, in The Strategy of Conflict, says that "precedent seems to exercise an influence that greatly exceeds its logical importance or legal force."¹⁵

The news media certainly did much to tar Truman with the brush of irresponsibility, to blame him totally for allowing Korea to happen. The July 24th edition of Life stated

Because Harry S Truman is a politician, during the 1948 campaign he promised the people some expensive things - continued high farm price supports, increased social security - and in order to pay off his campaign promises he took the money from the military budget. He gambled that we would not need Forrestal's combat forces and lost the gamble.¹⁶

And the fear brought about by Truman's alleged "bungling" was given added emphasis by such articles as the following from Fortune. "The U. S. must accept the possibility of an all-out war with Russia that could come tomorrow . . . The U S might have to support two or three Korean-scale operations simultaneously."¹⁷

During the month of August the battle in Korea began to show the first but weak signs of progress for the UN forces. On the homefront, however, the transition toward a stronger military posture was being felt directly by the American people. On August 30, a New York Times article said, "An uneasiness over the threats of a rising spiral of prices runs through the many simple, hand written notes that have reached the President's desk."¹⁸

Truman's September 1st Address

President Truman delivered his second national address at 10:00 P.M. EST on September 1, 1950. The same diagnostic approach that was used on the first speech will again be employed not only to analyze the internal elements of the speech itself, but to provide a comparative basis for judgment. The following diagram depicts the relationship between the identifiers used, the audiences identified with, and the probable immediate value.

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
1. President's concern for fighting men in Korea.	USSR	-
	US	Pos
	Allies	-
2. Men in Korea are fighting age-old struggle for human liberty.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
3. US is fighting for law of peace.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
4. America must put aside all else to support fighting men.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
5. For the first time many nations are fighting under one flag.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
6. Chaos follows if rule of law is not upheld.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
7. The raw aggression in Korea left only two choices - appeasement or force.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
8. History teaches appeasement leads to more aggression and war.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
9. The firm handling of aggression is best hope of achieving peace.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
10. What is at stake in Korea is American way of life.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
11. US cannot long be free if other free nations are dominated.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
12. US and most other nations have worked for self-government world-wide	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
13. Communist nations have worked to hamper a just peace.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
14. Russia has violated pledges of international cooperation.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
15. Communists preach peace but practice aggression.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
16. Aggression in Korea compelled free nations to take protective action	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
17. UN able to act in Korea because free nations worked together	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
18. Americans can be proud of US role in creation of UN.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
19. US has taken lead step over last years in effort to unite and strengthen free nations.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
20. The struggle between freedom and Communism has brought free nations together.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
21. Fifty-three of the fifty-nine UN members joined to meet challenge of Communist aggression in Korea.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
22. The US and South Korea have had to bear brunt of fighting but other nations are joining the fight.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
23. All troops will fight under one flag and under General MacArthur.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
24. The build up to five divisions in eight weeks has been dramatic.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
25. American troops have fought well under difficult conditions.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
26. American men have fought with gallantry and honor.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
27. South Korean soldiers have fought fiercely.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
28. Korean population is giving support to UN forces	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
29. Valiant fighting is bringing results - enemy attacks beaten back with heavy losses inflicted	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
30 Enemy is spending strength - invasion has reached peak	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
31 Power to crush invasion is being gathered.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
32. Korea is only part of larger struggle.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
33 The US must build beyond the needs of fighting in Korea.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
34. Free nations of the world are joining US to develop mutual defense.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
35. US will have to increase Armed Forces, equipment, and resources	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
36. The economy of US has never been stronger, and the time has come when more of that strength will have to go to defense.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
37. Germany and Japan miscalculated ten years ago; we must insure would-be aggressors make no such miscalculations again.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
38. US productive power up 60% from ten years ago.	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
39. The transition from peace to world-wide defense requires certain sacrifices and restrictions in order to meet the challenge.	USSR US Allies	Neg Neg Pos
40. The US believes in the UN	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
41. Koreans ought to be free, independent, and united	USSR US Allies	Neg Pos Pos
42 US does not want Korea to expand into general war.	USSR US Allies	Pos Pos Pos

<u>Significant Identifier</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Value</u>
43. US does not want China to be misled or forced to oppose UN	USSR	Pos
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
44. US does not want any part of Asia for itself.	USSR	Pos
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
45. US believes in freedom for all Far East nations.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
46. The US does not believe in a preventive war.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
47. The US wants and will achieve peace.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
48. North Koreans have learned the penalties of following the dark and bloody path of Communism.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
49. The US has been called to give of its leadership, efforts, and resources to maintain peace and justice among free nations	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
50. Although the task ahead is great, the US will not fail.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos
51. We ask for God's help in the days ahead.	USSR	Neg
	US	Pos
	Allies	Pos

Truman began his September 1st address by attempting to identify with the American audience at the same basic level (self-interest) as used in his previous address. Whereas Truman began his first speech with a one-to-one, audience-to-event impersonal relationship, his second speech began with the establishment of a triangular relationship between Truman, the American audience, and the American soldiers fighting in Korea. By stating his concern for the soldiers and acknowledging the obvious concern of their relatives and friends at home, Truman established

with the audience a very personal kind of identification. In all other respects, however, the second speech appears to be a revised and updated version of the first. Truman repeats the same basic propositions of "appeasement leads to war" and "free nations were forced to fight." He expands the reference to the Axis aggression of the 1930's to argue by analogy that the Axis powers made a miscalculation then, and the Communists have miscalculated now. He uses the case of Axis aggression again in the middle of his address to demonstrate that the United States defeated the Axis nations with much less in terms of industrial production than now, and is therefore obviously capable of meeting the Communist challenge. Finally, Truman reaffirms the rightness of the role of the United Nations in handling the situation in Korea. As in his previous speech, he continues to give evidence of the Russian's unwillingness to abide by the rule of law, a rule which Truman believed embodied the ideal of the United Nations.

In an obvious attempt to answer the question of why the United States had to carry most of the load in Korea, Truman presents a brief historical review of the actions taken by the U. S. to counter the Communists, during his administration. His arguments from history are based on the fact that the U. S. took the "lead step." Here, the subtle implication is that if the U. S. doesn't take the first step, no step will be taken. Truman is thus articulating a "world" or "global" philosophy.

Truman's address is clearly characterized by a series of propositional dichotomies in that he places free-world actions, goals, and achievements on one side and those of the Communists on the other. This technique tends to give the effect of proof by antithesis, i e , free nations are

good/Communist nations are bad, rule of law is winning/rule of force is losing, the path of democracy leads to freedom/the path of Communism leads to blood and darkness. (See Figure 2)

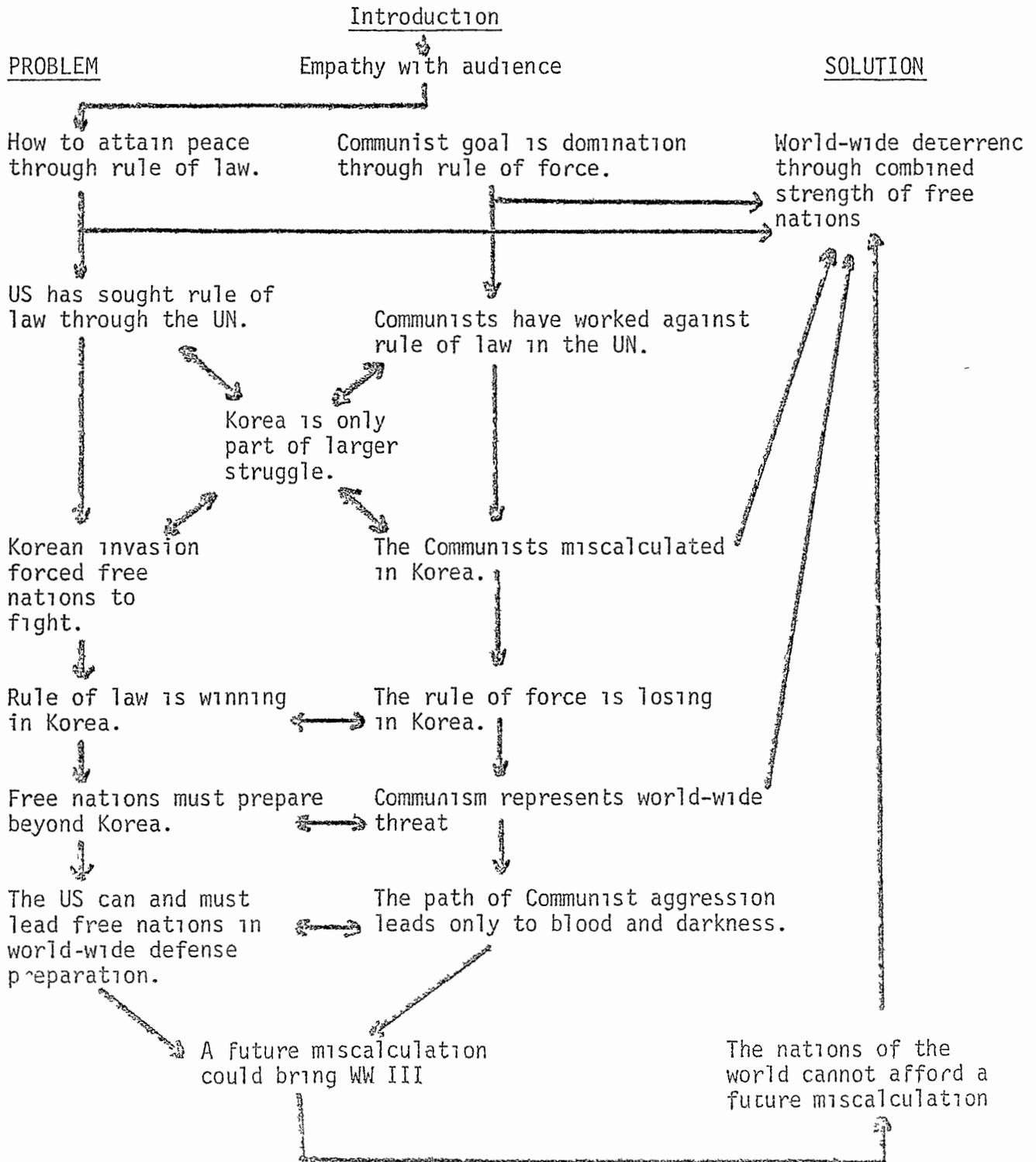
The most central question answered by Truman's second address concerns the matter of how to prevent the Communists from miscalculating further. Truman suggests the importance and obviousness of the question and then proceeds to demonstrate the obviousness of the answer through numerous propositions bearing either directly on the answer, the question, or other supporting propositions. This technique, though a departure from standard plans of organization, presents a strong unifying effect through multiple cross-reinforcement of propositions.

Looking back to the questions Truman posed and answered in his first address and the context within which that first speech functioned, there is strong reason to surmise that he was concerned with communicating certain convictions to the Communists even at the expense of reducing the appeal and impact of his statements on the American audience. In his second speech, Truman shows a definite but weak shift toward the American audience as though he hoped to reclaim their support and attempted to place a higher evaluation on the meaning and implications of Korea. This overture apparently grew out of the fact that Korea had by this time become for many Americans a symbolic threat over and beyond its actuality.

When the two addresses are evaluated in terms of Truman's four criteria for effective foreign policy (clarity, forcefulness, decisiveness, and determination),²⁰ it seems that his words and strategies more closely approximated an extension of his foreign policy actions than they reflected his concern for domestic approval. In other words, these two speeches were part of a verbal war with the Communists rather than a wooing or courting of the American people.

Figure 2

A STRATEGY REPRESENTATION OF TRUMAN'S SEPTEMBER 1ST SPEECH



Footnotes

¹Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.3.

²Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley University of California Press, 1969), pp 20-21.

³Ibid., p. 24

⁴Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S Truman, 1950 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965), pp. 537-542.

⁵Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), pp. 167-168.

⁶Ibid., p. 169

⁷Ibid., p. 221.

⁸Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 3.

⁹Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹Public Papers of the Presidents, p. 541.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴"The Fortune Consumer Outlook," Fortune, August, 1950, pp. 57-60.

¹⁵Thomas C. Shelling, The Strategy of Conflict (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 67.

¹⁶"Why are we taking a beating?," Life, July 24, 1950, p. 21.

¹⁷"America's Commitment," Fortune, August, 1950, p. 54.

¹⁸New York Times, August 30, 1950, Sec. I, p. 1, col. 4.

¹⁹Public Papers of Presidents, pp. 609-614.

²⁰Truman, Mr. Citizen, pp 281-282

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the first chapter, the problem investigated in this study centered on the relationship between Truman's war rhetoric during the first six months of the Korean Conflict and his decline in popularity that began just following the outset of the war. The approach taken to this problem involved tracing the development of Truman as a rhetorical agent and of the Korean Conflict as a rhetorical exigence. Examining the nature and results of the encounter between the agent and the exigence was considered a crucial prerequisite to understanding Truman's handling of a "hot" war in a "cold" war context.

In the second chapter we noticed that Truman began his building of personal character and human understanding at a very early age. Since having to wear very thick-lensed glasses prevented him from participating in rough and tumble youth games, he turned to reading almost every book he could find. As a result of his extensive reading, he became well versed in history and the Bible. There are strong indications that Truman's knowledge of human nature and historical events not only gave him a unique perception of himself and his world, but created within him an appetite for life and living. Truman applied his understanding to the various situations that confronted him and used each experience to extend, confirm, and refine his existing perceptions of man and of man's relationship to the world.

Closely connected to Truman's perception of man and of the

natural and recurring order of events was his conviction of rightness. When the events in his life brought him to the point that would have defeated men of weaker substance, Truman seemed to look beyond the immediate implications of the situation and framed his responses accordingly. When his clothing store failed during the depression, it would have been expedient for him to have eliminated his debts through bankruptcy proceedings; instead, he held himself above defeat by accepting the responsibility for the store debts. And he could have walked away from the second senate race after everyone said that, without Tom Pendergast, he was through, but he had to prove his opponents wrong and himself right. When Harry Truman was sure he was right, he had the ability to convince others that he was right, too. Truman made mistakes in his attempts to do the right thing, but he never abandoned his belief in rightness as the basis for human action.

Truman's pre-political life brought him into contact with many people and many occupations. It was his varied experiences that enabled him to identify with a wide spectrum of the American population, including farmers, railroad workers, bankers, veterans, and laborers in general. His willingness to speak out on matters of equal opportunity identified him with minority groups. His lack of sophistication in speech, appearance or manner furthered his identification with the humble and bespoke a character that, while inflexible, was altogether believable. His broad-spectrum identification and credibility, combined with an unusual perceptiveness and grasp of human nature, gave Truman persuasive qualities not understood or appreciated by his opponents.

Truman's political life prior to his becoming President provided him with the opportunity to demonstrate his strong personal character

and to achieve high credibility despite initially being labeled a pawn of the Pendergast political machine. Evidence strongly suggests that Truman's subsequent credibility was additionally enhanced by his having been wrongly perceived initially.

After Truman succeeded to the Presidency, his popularity with the American public was far from consistent. Immediately after he took office, the public generally understood the vastness of the task Truman faced and identified with him strongly. As the pains of changing from a nation at war to a nation at peace began to affect the public, however, empathy turned to dissatisfaction and blame as Truman became increasingly identified with the Nation's ills by his opponents. On the other hand, his popularity soared when he was able to demonstrate some form of personal strength in dealing positively with nations, individuals, or issues perceived as being inconsistent with the interests of the American public.

Truman found himself more and more in the middle of trying to satisfy contending forces, and each decision normally resulted in one or more of the contenders becoming unhappy with the outcome. This meant essentially that many decisions resulted in an unfavorable outcome to someone, the cause of whose unhappiness could be associated directly with Truman. Administration opponents seemingly never failed to use every opportunity to publicly identify Truman with any unfavorable aspect of a decision made by him or a member of his administration. The more decisions made by the administration, and many were made, the greater the chance of mistake, the greater the number of contending factions unhappy, and the more readily available the opportunity to criticize and undermine. By June, 1950, Truman's popularity with the American people had experienced a progressive decline for almost a year and a half.

When South Korea was invaded by the North Korean Communists, Truman was forced to decide between doing nothing and taking a stand for the rule of law. A decision to do nothing was perceived as representing an open invitation to similar acts in the future that would eventually have to be halted on a larger scale. Truman obviously determined that the Communists had to be stopped in Korea and that any delay would make the job more difficult and possibly bring about a direct confrontation with Russia.

By deciding to take action to prevent the Communist takeover of South Korea, Truman also accepted the task of convincing the Communists that they had miscalculated, as well as convincing the American people that it was in their best interest to support his decision. Of the two tasks, Truman was much more concerned with convincing the Communists and reducing the possibility of a nuclear war.

It is important to understand that national interests do not always coincide with the self-interests of the individuals making up the nation. It is apparent that it is not in the best interest of the men in a rifle squad to have them assault a fortified enemy position, but such action may represent the only way to save the remainder of the platoon or company. At the national level, as with the rifle squad, in time of war the interests of a few are subordinated to the interests of the whole. Still, emotional tensions will remain, even in the face of right reason and impeccable logic.

The expenditure of human lives has never been popular, but what makes the effects of a limited war, such as the Korean Conflict, different from the effects of a general war, such as World War II, is significant in understanding Truman's rhetoric and his decline in popularity with the American people. In a general war, the end normally comes as

a result of beating or being beaten by the opposition. The consequences of losing a general war are not restricted to the soldiers on the battlefield but affects every man, woman, and child. It affects the banker, the nurse, the teacher, the rich, and the poor. The only choice available to the public in a general war is between winning and losing, which is really no choice at all. It is therefore easy for the adroit rhetorician to emotionalize the idea of winning a total war totally.

Unlike the immediate and obvious consequences of the general war, the limited war poses no immediate threat to the population and is based essentially on the needs of the nation to maintain a power balance. The apparent proposition supporting the limited war is that an imbalance of power leads to general war, and general war in a nuclear age between nuclear powers produces no winner. And unlike the lack of choice inherent to a general war, the limited war, since it poses no immediate threat, does not reduce the options to kill or be killed. In the words of Robert T. Oliver in The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, "people can only be induced willingly to do what they desire to do."¹ It is the lack of choice in a general war that induces people to fight for their lives and the lives of their relatives and friends. And it is the lack of a similar inducement inherent in a limited war that produces an unwillingness in the people to forfeit their lives and comforts for a cause too distant to be perceived clearly and strongly. As explained by Aristotle, "we do not fear things that are a very long way off. for instance, we all know we shall die, but we are not troubled thereby, because death is not close at hand."² Stated succinctly, Truman faced a rhetorical task with regard to the American people that was virtually impossible.

Truman found himself rhetorically in the middle of contending

forces (American and Russian) as far as the Korean Conflict was concerned. Knowing that all public utterances made by the President are essentially foreign policy statements, Truman was compelled to frame his rhetorical responses largely along foreign policy lines. Since Truman admittedly involved the United States in the Korean Conflict for the purpose of preventing a third world war, it seems no less fitting that he should pursue the same goal rhetorically.

The Truman Administration had been accused of "being soft on Communism," but Truman did not use the Korean Conflict as a forum for discrediting his accusers. Truman was being cut to pieces for the defense posture of the nation that "invited" the attack on South Korea, yet he did not use the Korean crisis as a forum to point the finger of guilt at others. In view of the existing Communist reports that America was a divided nation, one might contend that Truman did not use the Korean crisis to improve his own credibility with the American people because of the adverse effect on his foreign policy statements. It stands to reason that Truman could not have demonstrated American determination concerning Korea had he addressed matters of partisan politics

As previously mentioned in the fourth chapter, there are different levels at which persuasion can effectively occur, depending on the parties involved. Truman chose to "speak" the language of the Communists at the most basic level by meeting force with force. Yet when he sought to identify the Korean aggression with the American audience, the attempt was made to correlate the sacrifice of American lives with right-doing and the perceived Communist threat. This is not stated as a criticism of Truman but merely to point out that no positive level of correlation

existed. The problem inherent in an attempt to identify things that are different, such as right-doing with the sacrifice of human life, involves the variation of priorities. What is being suggested here is that identification can only occur effectively when right-doing or the threat of Communism are perceived at the same level of importance as preservation of human life.

In Truman's attempt to reach the people with his addresses, it could be argued that his rhetoric was not effective because he did not say everything about one topic before moving to the next. It was also true that his speeches demonstrated a loose relationship between value-propositions or arguments. There will probably always be those who view Truman's rhetoric in negative terms, because he did things differently. But I tend to agree with the view of his rhetoric espoused by Brockreide and Scott in Moments in the Rhetoric of the Cold War.

Under some conditions, many short exposures to parts of an argument may be more effective than one long exposition of a complete argument. In addition, the placing of an argument into a variety of contexts . . . may enhance its effectiveness. Furthermore, the gradual unfolding of an argument may give it momentum, each appearance of the theme enhances the cumulative effect of the total argument. Finally, by exposing the listener to bits and pieces of an argument, a speaker may encourage his interest and involvement, which the listener would not feel if he heard the fully developed argument in one continuous passage ³

Although a review of the drafts of the two national addresses clearly shows that each resulted from a basic draft being processed through certain members of the Truman staff, it is also clear that Truman agreed with the content and arrangement of the speeches because he made many changes in the drafts sent for his approval.

Truman's decline in popularity following American involvement in the Korean Conflict did not occur because he failed to explain the war adequately. Although he did not present his addresses with the

American audience exclusively in mind, the decline was inevitable. The lack of a correlative identification level (meaning that American sacrifices could not be directly attributed to the Communists) clearly identified Truman with the problem. Whether faulting him for inadequate preparation or for making a bad decision, the people had no one else to attack or to blame. One does not blame the Congress for opposing the President, for Congress is not a person and therefore not susceptible to blame or responsibility. It was all too obvious that Truman was aware of this in his following comments:

Having served in two branches of government, legislative and executive, I think I am expressing a considered and impartial opinion in saying that the powers of the President are much more difficult to exercise and preserve from encroachment than those of the Congress. In part, this difficulty stems from the problems of our time and from the fact that upon the President falls the responsibility of obtaining action, timely and adequate to meet the Nation's needs. Whatever the Constitution says, it is the President who is held responsible for disaster.⁴

In another comment about the conflict that is inherent between the President and the Congress, Truman explains that conflict "is not a bad thing; on the contrary, it is a good thing for the preservation of the liberty of the people--as long as it does not become conflict for its own sake."⁵

Not even the President of the United States is capable of maintaining a favorable public image in the face of systematically biased and often erroneous charges from sources having moderate to high credibility. The nature of the situation faced by Truman with certain members of Congress is well represented in the following statement by President Eisenhower:

We came into power, the Republicans did, for the first time in twenty years. There was not a single Senator, Republican Senator in the Senate who had ever served with a Republican President. Now, as a result, they were raised in this tradition of antagonism between the Executive and the Legislature, and it was very, very difficult for the Republican Senators, at first,

to remember that their job was now to cooperate with the President and he with them. On the contrary, they felt that they had to cut him down, at first, it was instinctive.⁶

With every issue having at least two sides, it was this "instinctive" cutting down of the President that for Truman made a virtually impossible task totally impossible.

In summary, it was not Truman's inability as a rhetorician that brought about his decline in popularity during the Korean Conflict. Rather, it was basically his decision to respond to a national threat that did not represent a perceived immediate threat by the population. Since the options had not been reduced to kill or be killed, the nature of the situation in Korea lacked the inducement required for the "willing" expenditure of human lives. In addition to the lack of a correlative level of identification (kill or be killed), there was the matter of blame. Since Truman was President and the only single individual in position to be blamed, every pain, discomfort, and sacrifice associated with the war could be identified with Truman. After the initial national unity fostered by the Korean decision, many found it expedient to point out the apparently obvious relationship between Truman and all that was wrong in the country.

Truman did not fit the mold of President and he did not fit the mold of rhetorician, yet in the face of seemingly impossible odds, he excelled in both roles. His Presidency came at a time of national turbulence and crisis, and it came at a time when many Republicans were so hungry for a Presidential victory that opposing a Democratic President became the primary mission of their public careers. Some of Truman's constituents failed to grasp the essence of the man and his work because they did not perceive either to be in their best interest, and others chose to ridicule or ignore him perhaps because he represented an

unfathomable paradox. But those who earnestly sought to know the "common" man from Missouri found a human being of unusual qualities and vision. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill: "I misjudged you badly [at Yalta] . . . Since that time, you, more than any other man, have saved Western Civilization."⁷ As President and as rhetorician, Harry S. Truman was truly an uncommon man.

Footnotes

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 48.

²Aristotle, Rhetoric 11. 5.

³Wayne Brockriede and Robert L. Scott, Moments in the Rhetoric of the Cold War (New York: Random House Inc, 1970), p. 36.

⁴Harry S. Truman, Mr. Citizen (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1960), p. 223.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Opinion expressed by Dwight D. Eisenhower during CBS News Special, "The Long War: Congress vs. the President," March 19, 1973.

⁷Alfred Steinberg, The Man from Missouri (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), pp. 11-12.

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