

Pathfinder

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Is negotiation the road to peace?

The busiest meeting-week Washington had seen since the one that started on Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941, hit its cold and soggy zenith at 9:41 a.m. last Monday.

In a wind so raw and wet that it might have come from North Korea, Great Britain's Clement Richard Attlee clasped hands with Harry S. Truman. They stood on the apron of the National Airport, smiling and beaming—old friends who had not seen each other since Potsdam, five years ago. Still smiling, they parted a few minutes later, to meet again promptly at 4 p.m. at the White House. Then there were no smiles.

Prime Minister Attlee, here at his own suggestion, wasted no time in niceties. His nation's interests, he reassured the President and his ten closest advisers, paralleled those of the U.S.; Russia could never drive a wedge between them. But Attlee pleaded for caution.

It would be hard, he acknowledged, for a nation, admittedly the world's leader, to retreat. But now it might be more valorous to accede, in part, to the demands of the Red Chinese; order MacArthur's withdrawal to the 38th Parallel, to reconsider the fate of Formosa—and, most important, to win time.

Silent Audience. Tight-lipped, Harry Truman heard Attlee out. Then Gen. Omar N. Bradley, in his flat, unemotional voice, gave Attlee a brief recital of the facts of life—and death—on Korea. He spoke of disaster, far beyond the worst fears of the Prime Minister. Attlee's ideas about a U.N. withdrawal to the 38th Parallel were well-nigh academic. If at all possible, a beachhead at Pusan was more to the point.

What prompted Attlee's hurry-up visit was the President's A-bomb announcement the previous Thursday. There had always been active consideration of its use, the President had told his press conference, for it is one of our weapons. At Lake Success, at London, at Paris and presumably at Peking, a wave of questions and fears arose. Did the President mean that the U.S. was ready to atom-blast the Red Chinese?

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Though a clarifier came from the White House later in the day (only Truman can order the use of the bomb and he hasn't yet) the mere fact that such a move was being considered startled France and Britain into action. Once the bomb was loosed there could be no retreat. The U.S., with or without partners, would be in a full war in Asia; Europe would be wide open to attack and the 30-year-old strategy of Soviet Russia for world conquest would near fulfillment. Attlee's mission, aside from persuading the U.S. that such a course was fatal, was to get the truth. If England was in mortal peril, Attlee had every right to know it.

It is likely that the President's ideas about the A-bomb crystallized at the National Security Council meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 28. The night before Gen. Douglas MacArthur had reported the dismal facts by telescreen to the Pentagon: The "home-by-Christmas" assault had failed; he would be lucky to salvage a holding force from the debacle.



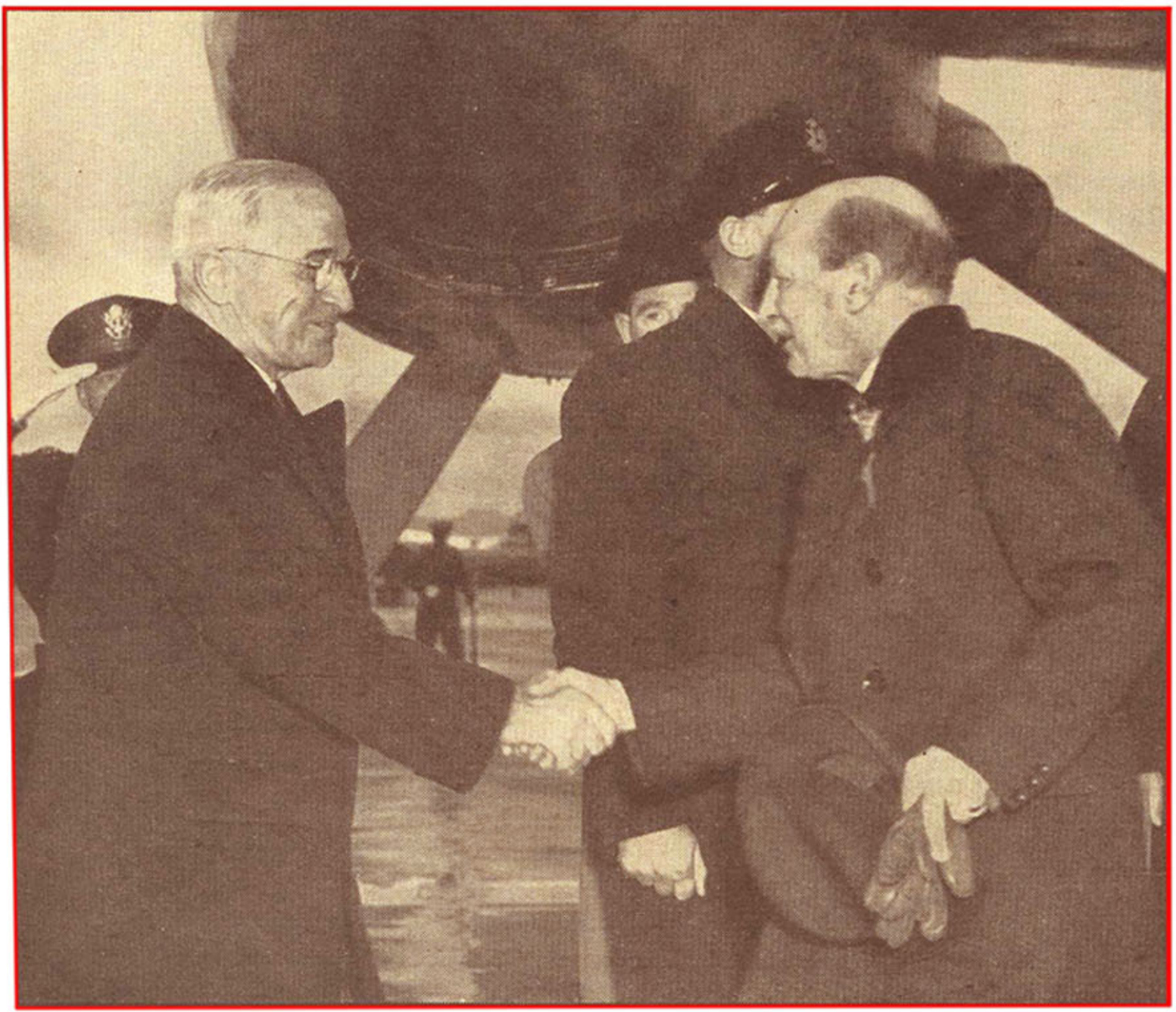
***Acheson.** He seeks a way to save MacArthur from defeat.*

Allies

At 11 a.m. the President spoke first to General Bradley. How bad, he wanted to know, would the casualties be? "Very bad, I'm afraid, sir. It is too early for an accurate estimate, but our losses will be heavy." Then the President asked how serious the situation was. "Critical," was Bradley's terse response.

No Reserves. What could be done? The President wanted to know. And with Secretary Marshall nodding agreement, Bradley spelled it out: The best U.S. arms and men were with MacArthur. Except for a few divisions and raw recruits at home, there were no more. MacArthur must win or lose with what he had. Dean G. Acheson, often accused of being soft toward communism, was a singular holdout. He agreed that Europe could not be stripped, but over and over he wondered if there wasn't some way to shore up the U.N. forces. There wasn't.

The best that Harry Truman could do he did on Friday, Dec. 1. He asked for \$18 billion more in arms money and 50,000 new draftees. But even as he sought help from a willing Congress, Harry Truman was confronted with a sorrowful truth. MacArthur might be booted out of Korea before the 50,000 could be even fitted with their new Army boots.



President & premier. Attlee fears for Britain's life.