

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

### **General MacArthur: Uniformed Politician (1948-1952)**

Patrick Tilden, Xavier University

Despite his excellent military history, General Douglas MacArthur's long string of insubordinate and reckless actions forced President Truman to call for his resignation on April 11, 1951. MacArthur's inherently maverick attitude, distrust in Truman's lack of military experience, and ardent fervor against communism help explain why he acted as he did. However, his megalomaniac tendencies hint that MacArthur's actions were more politically angled towards the possibility of a Presidential run in 1952. MacArthur harbored campaign support in the 1944 and 1948 elections but was unable to run because he would have to leave the Pacific front of the war unresolved. Much of his insubordination and hasty actions were motivated by his desires of either ending the war as early as possible, giving him time to return state-side and campaign, consolidating political power to portray himself as an equal to the sitting president, or to differentiate himself from Truman as the tougher alternative.

Over the course of his service as Supreme Commander of the United Nation forces in Japan and Korea from 1948 to 1952, General Douglas MacArthur committed numerous insubordinate acts against the Joint Chiefs of Staff and President Truman. Many times, MacArthur made statements that directly contradicted United States foreign policy. On occasion, he not only made statements, but directly acted with powers not endowed to him by the President nor any public vote. MacArthur's insubordination led U.S. allies like Britain, France and Germany to grow confused and frustrated; it led enemies like Russia and Communist China to increase warring and nuclear tensions. Though MacArthur received public acclaim for adopting a hardline stance, the general's insubordination gave President Truman no option but to dismiss him on April 11, 1951.

Whereas MacArthur's military career enjoyed prolific success, his political campaigns failed on many different levels. MacArthur eyed the Republican nomination for President in 1944, 1948, and 1952. His 1944 bid was hardly taken seriously and thus barely passed the exploratory phase. MacArthur's 1948 attempt had the most wind under its sail, but still only resulted in a couple dozen electoral delegates. His campaign was plagued by poor organization, a late announcement, hinging too largely on momentum, and, most damning, his inability to return to the US and campaign at all. MacArthur was too engrossed in the task of running Japan. By 1952, MacArthur's ideas were too inflammatory for a public that was beginning to comprehend the dangers of the

Cold War. Yet, he was still seen as a party elder and gave the keynote address at the Republican convention.

General MacArthur was undeniably power obsessed and incredibly conceited, but nevertheless a tactical genius. It is interesting to wonder whether MacArthur was more than just a megalomaniac. This research considers the question: Was MacArthur, at least to some extent, a self-interested political schemer or opportunist while being supreme commander of the UN forces in Korea? Upon research synthesis, the argument emerges that indeed MacArthur considered the political effects of his decisions, proposals, and insubordinate actions. Such a contention is not entirely new. President Truman pointed at “partisan politics” to explain MacArthur’s insubordination in his *Memoirs*. Similarly, in their *General MacArthur and President Truman: The Struggle for Control of American Foreign Policy* (1951), Richard H. Rovere and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. argue of MacArthur’s political motivations. Yet, the contention that the two works share is largely discounted because of the timely, partisan, and political context in which it has been presented. Research conducted has thus focused entirely on hard evidence, avoided connecting dots by reliance on just MacArthur’s narcissism, and has drawn any possible correlations directly to either his 1948 or 1952 Presidential campaign activities.

Primary sources can help to examine the extent to which MacArthur made political decisions while serving as Supreme Commander. Correspondence between MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Truman and MacArthur’s statements to the press, memorandums of conversation, notes of meetings, speeches, and diplomat correspondence with the Truman administration all shed light on how the events leading to MacArthur’s dismissal were interpreted in real time. When not directly disagreeing over policy, MacArthur would argue the line where his power met the President’s, as he was Supreme Commander, not just an American general. New York Times articles indicate the high levels of public support for MacArthur and Truman’s waning approval as the Korean Conflict continued. With dates and times specifically denoted, the documents tell a direct story of when MacArthur’s thoughts or actions contradicted that of the White House.

Secondary sources also told the story of blatant insubordination, but with more comprehensive analysis. Haruki Wada’s article, *The Korean War, Stalin’s Policy, and Japan*, gives insightful implications of what would follow should MacArthur succeeded in lobbying Truman to drop atomic bombs on the Korean-Chinese border. Wada concludes that Stalin must have been relieved that MacArthur was dismissed just as much as the British. *MacArthur’s Blockade Proposals against Red China* by John Norman expresses the recklessness of MacArthur’s suggestions, concluding that although they would accomplish their goal quickly, stability with China and Russia would be sacrificed. Peter Lowe’s *An Ally and a Recalcitrant General: Great Britain, Douglas MacArthur and the Korean War*,

1950-1 expresses how MacArthur's contradictory policy and tone created tensions and division between the British and American governments.

Howard B Shonberger offers a critical, connecting account of MacArthur's 1948 Presidential run. Shoneberger merely shares the story and troubles of the campaign. Similarly, John Edward Wiltz debunks many myths in his *Truman and MacArthur: The Wake Island Meeting*. Wiltz shares that Truman's domestic politics mainly drove the meeting, but also gave details of MacArthur's subtle slights and politicking as well. For instance, MacArthur shook the president's hand instead of saluting as a soldier should. When analyzing the nature of MacArthur's insubordination, the dates of its occurrence, and the flaws his campaign succumbed to in 1948, a new picture emerges.

It could be argued that MacArthur made military plans and insubordinate statements with the political intention of putting himself in a position of power, and ultimately lining up to win the presidency in 1952. Above all, MacArthur looked to learn from the mistakes he made in the 1948 election and quickly capitalize on his popular support stateside. MacArthur thus sought to the end the war quickly, using any means necessary, even nuclear weapons.

After starting the research paper with an introduction and thesis statement, the paper would provide evidence that MacArthur was, contrary to popular belief, quite interested and savvy in politics. It would go on to establish that MacArthur was positioning himself be viewed as an equal to President Truman, and that he was potentially even advocating a swift and total war as a way to ensure he personally had time to make a run for office. In Shonberger's words, "Always MacArthur was ambiguous enough about his interest in the Presidency to encourage his supporters and arouse the fear of Democratic and Republican rivals. He was also disingenuous enough that, should anything go wrong, he could disavow any personal political ambition."

The research paper would close by stepping away from the historical context and thinking logically. Simply put, an intelligent man who plans to run for the presidency a third time, would try to not repeat his mistakes, and do whatever he could to emphasize his advantages. Vein political shrouds aside, this is exactly what General MacArthur did. MacArthur had civil service in his veins, his grandfather was once the Governor of Wisconsin. As a Supreme Commander of United Nation forces and a five-star general, the only promotion he could even possibly receive would be the Oval Office. He played his cards as carefully as he could, but by underestimating Russian and Chinese dangers, his gaming became inappropriate. His dismissal was largely because he put his own ambition before his country. General MacArthur thus went a full 360 degrees in his military career, completing a transition from civilian to civil servant and back again.

## Bibliography

"American Experience . MacArthur . MacArthur's Speeches: 'Old Soldiers Never Die...' | PBS." Accessed December 3, 2016.

Conklin, William R. "On M'Arthur's Triumphant Tour of New York Millions Welcome M'Arthur to City." The New York Times. N.p., 21 Apr. 1951. Web. 14 Dec. 2016.

Cummings, Bruce. "Why Did Truman Really Fire MacArthur? ... The Obscure History of Nuclear Weapons and the Korean War Provides the Answer." Accessed December 3, 2016.

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume VI, East Asia and the Pacific, *Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup)*. Document 694.001/1-1050.

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume VI, East Asia and the Pacific, Extracts of a *Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. W. Averell Harriman, Special Assistant to the President, With General MacArthur in Tokyo on August 6 and 8, 1950*. Document 795.00/8-850.

Lowe, Peter. "An Ally and a Recalcitrant General: Great Britain, Douglas MacArthur and the Korean War, 1950-1." *The English Historical Review* 105, no. 416 (1990): 624-53.

Norman, John. "MacArthur's Blockade Proposals against Red China." *Pacific Historical Review* 26, no. 2 (1957): 161-74.

Schnabel, J. F. (1972). CHAPTER XX: The Relief of MacArthur. In *The United States Army in the Korean War* (Policy and Direction: The First Year ed., Vol. 4, pp. 364-378). Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History.

Schonberger, Howard B. "The General and the Presidency: Douglas MacArthur and the Election of 1948." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 57, no. 3 (1974): 201-19.

Texts of Accounts by Lucas and Considine on Interviews with MacArthur in 1954. [Interview by J. Lucas & B. Cosidine]. (1964, April 9). The New York Times, pp. 16-17.

“Truman Library: Anonymous Statement Regarding General Douglas MacArthur’s Statement on Formosa, Ca. September 1950. President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed October 19, 2016.

“Truman Library: Douglas MacArthur to Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 23, 1950. Naval Aide Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed December 3, 2016.

“Truman Library: Douglas MacArthur to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 16, 1950. Naval Aide Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed October 19, 2016.

“Truman Library: Douglas MacArthur’s Statement Regarding His Trip to Formosa, August 1, 1950. President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed October 19, 2016.

“Truman Library: Harry S. Truman to Douglas MacArthur, January 13, 1951. President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed October 19, 2016.

“Truman Library: Joint Chiefs of Staff to Douglas MacArthur, Attached to Copy of Letter from Douglas MacArthur to Joe Martin, March 20, 1951. President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed December 3, 2016.

“Truman Library: Memorandum for the President, ‘World Reaction to the Wake Island Meeting’, October 17, 1950. President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed December 3, 2016.

“Truman Library: Statement of General Douglas MacArthur, March 25, 1951. President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers.” Accessed October 12, 2016.

Wada, Haruki. "The Korean War, Stalin's Policy, and Japan." *Social Science Japan Journal* 1, no. 1 (1998): 5-29.

Wiltz, John Edward. "Truman and MacArthur: The Wake Island Meeting." *Military Affairs* 42, no. 4 (1978): 169-76.

