

The Issue of Effective Leadership: General MacArthur's Inchon Flank

by Steve Douglas

In the days after the Nov. 2 Presidential election, Lyndon LaRouche spoke of the special qualities of leadership that a great commander in chief represents, and how that type of leadership—which LaRouche uniquely embodies—is what is desperately needed in the United States today. He cited Gen. Douglas MacArthur's design and conduct of the Battle of Inchon in the Korean War as exemplary of this quality. This summary of that brilliant flanking operation by MacArthur is provided for historical background.

On June 25, 1950, ten divisions of the North Korean Armed Forces, backed by 1,643 heavy guns and Soviet tanks, streamed across the 38th Parallel and attacked the Republic of Korea. This action was undertaken as an included feature of an asymmetrical warfare response on the part of the Soviet Union and China, against the aggressive maneuverings of U.S. President Harry Truman and his Anglophile controllers and handlers in the U.S. State Department. Meeting in emergency session on June 25, and again on June 27, the United Nations Security Council called for the use of force “to repel the armed attack.”

Gen. Douglas MacArthur, serving as Supreme Commander of Allied Headquarters in Japan and director of reconstruction efforts in that shattered nation since 1945, flew to the front in Korea to survey the situation on June 29. He immediately concluded that the commitment of U.S. ground troops were necessary, if the North Korean onslaught were to be halted and reversed. Notwithstanding the manifest power and support of the U.S. Navy and Air Force in the area, the Army of the Republic of Korea was simply no match for the North Korean divisions. With less than 100,000 soldiers, it lacked armor, anti-tank weapons, and heavy artillery, making it better suited for domestic police actions than repelling a large-scale invasion.

On July 10, MacArthur was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations forces in Korea. But even as U.S. ground troops that had been stationed in Japan were fed into the conflict, the North Koreans continued their advance southward. Morale among the allied troops was low and sinking, as they suffered repeated battlefield setbacks and steadily retreated toward what in late July was finally established as the Pusan Perimeter.

The ‘Three Battles of Inchon’

On July 23, 1950, General MacArthur launched what was, in actuality, the first of three battles of Inchon. He cabled Washington with his audacious proposal for a two-division corps (30,000 troops) amphibious flanking assault at Inchon—a surprise landing hundreds of miles behind the North Korean front lines. MacArthur recognized that the Pusan beachhead/perimeter could not be maintained indefinitely, for both political and military reasons. So he decided to remedy the situation with a bold counterstroke. The surprise landing at Inchon was conceptualized as a blow which would relieve the pressure on Pusan, and secure victory in the war in totality, *in a single stroke*. His proposal to his superiors in Washington stated:

“Operation planned mid-September is amphibious landing of a two-division corps in rear of enemy lines for purpose of enveloping and destroying enemy forces in conjunction with attack from south by Eighth Army [in the Pusan area]. I am firmly convinced, that early and strong effort behind his front will sever his main lines of communications and enable us to deliver a decisive and crushing blow. . . . The alternative is a frontal assault which can only result in a protracted and expensive campaign.”

So it was that MacArthur commenced the “First” Battle of Inchon—against the unanimous opposition of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, including emphatically its Chairman, Gen. Omar Bradley. Bradley had declared his unequivocal opposition to the undertaking of amphibious landings—of precisely the sort that MacArthur wanted to undertake at Inchon—in the course of testimony to Congress in October 1949.

The “Second” Battle of Inchon was waged against the North Korean Armed Forces during and after the landing.

The “Third” Battle of Inchon was fought by MacArthur against President Truman and the U.S. State Department, following his victory over the North Koreans on the battlefield.

The battle which MacArthur had to conduct against the Joint Chiefs in order to secure their grudging and belated authorization for his Inchon design, is paradigmatic of what the distilled essence of warfare actually is—combat in the realm of ideas. No shots were fired in the course of MacArthur's fight with the Joint Chiefs, yet, *it was precisely in that*



Gen. Douglas MacArthur (seated) and other officers observe the shelling of Inchon from the USS McKinley, Sept. 15, 1950. "Surprise," MacArthur told the naysayers in Washington, "is the most vital element for success in modern war."

conflict that the historic Battle of Inchon—with its attendant potential for ending the entire war—was won. The performance of the land, sea, and air components of MacArthur's assault force was incontestably brilliant on the day of the landing, and thereafter. But it was MacArthur's victory against the Joint Chiefs in the conference room which secured the basis for his troops' spectacular triumph on the battlefield.

Washington Foot-Dragging and Opposition

To say that Washington, including President Truman's Anglophile entourage, was unenthusiastic about MacArthur's plan, is the political understatement of the Korean War. For three full weeks, the Joint Chiefs maintained a stony silence. Finally, they cabled MacArthur to inform him that Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff, and Adm. Forrest Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations, were coming to Tokyo, to "discuss" the matter with him. So it was, that on Aug. 23 a strategy summit was convened, involving MacArthur, Collins, Sherman, Gen. Lemuel Shepherd (Chief of the Marine Corps), and a host of additional admirals and generals and their chiefs of staff, to discuss the pros and cons of MacArthur's proposed Inchon operation.

Summing up the Navy's extensive, initial presentation, Admiral Sherman said, "If every possible geographical and naval handicap were listed—Inchon has 'em all." His staff had delineated a number of them:

- The horrible tides at Inchon: On the projected date of the landing, the tides would rise and fall 30 feet (!). At low

tide, quicksand-like mud flats stretched out 2 miles into the harbor, away from the landing beaches. Whatever troops could land in the two hour window around high tide in the morning, would be "on their own" for the day. The landing craft which brought them in would be stuck in the mud, helplessly exposed, until the next high tide came in twelve hours later, to float them out.

- The main approach to the port of Inchon, "the Flying Fish Channel," was a narrow, winding channel, with treacherous currents of up to six knots. Any ship sunk at a particularly vulnerable point in the channel, could block access to the port for all other ships.

- The formidable Wolmi-Do Island fortress, which rose 350 feet above the water at the mouth of the harbor, could not be "softened up" by pre-invasion bombardment and bombing, because to do so would forfeit the element of surprise in the landing, which was the key to its success.

- The landings would have to be made in the heart of the city, itself. This meant that the enemy would have a series of excellent strong points, from which to wage resistance against the first wave of Marine assault troops.

Following these and other objections raised by the Navy, Army Chief of Staff Collins weighed in with an even longer litany of objections. Among his contentions:

- Inchon was too far removed from Pusan, to have an immediate effect on that battle area. It was so far away, that the Inchon forces and those of Walker's Eighth Army would not be able to complement one another, as pincers, in a joint action.

- MacArthur's plan called for extracting the First Marine Brigade from Pusan, and attaching it to his landing force at Inchon. This would so weaken the already tenuous defenses at Pusan, that it could collapse the entire defense perimeter.

- MacArthur's troops moving out from Inchon, would likely encounter heavy enemy resistance around Seoul, and could suffer an overwhelming defeat.

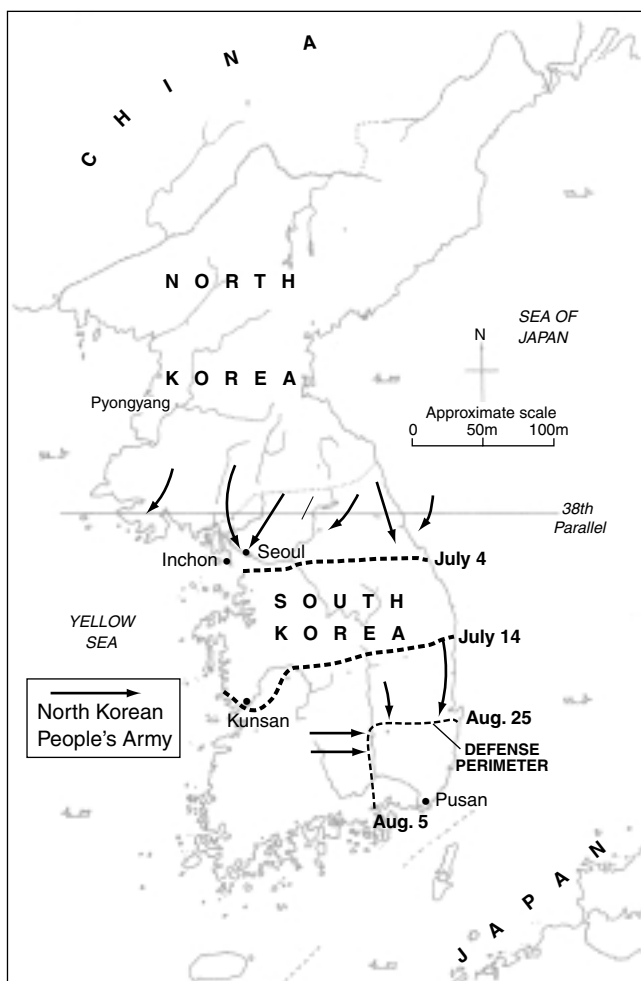
- Collins propounded an alternative to Inchon—a landing at the west coast part of Kunsan. This city was within 100 miles of the Pusan Perimeter, had better landing beaches, and few of Inchon's imposing physical obstacles. Admiral Sherman immediately endorsed Collins' proposal, whereupon Collins concluded his presentation.

MacArthur's Triumph over Washington

The silence that gripped the room, thereafter, was matched only by the tension generated by the attendees' anx-

FIGURE 1

The North Korean Invasion of South Korea, June 24-September 1950



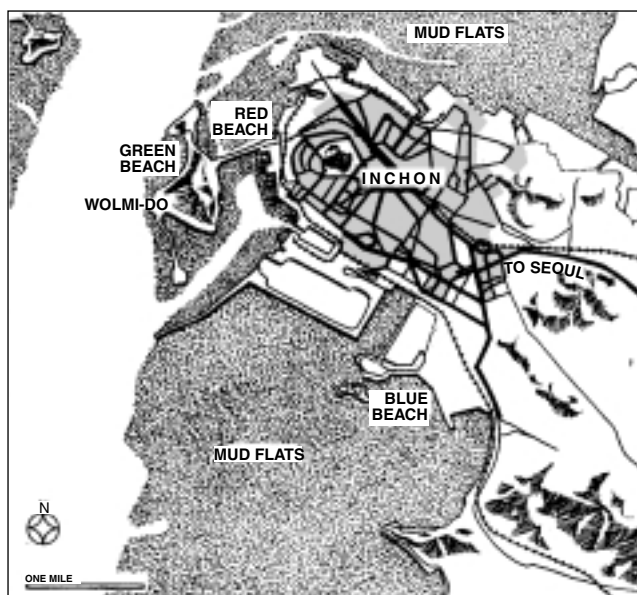
ious anticipation of MacArthur's response. MacArthur began noting that the enemy had committed the bulk of his troops in deployment against General Walker's defense perimeter. MacArthur was convinced, that the enemy had not properly prepared Incheon for defense:

"The very arguments you have made as to the impracticabilities involved will tend to ensure for me the element of surprise. For the enemy commander will reason that no one would be so brash as to make such an attempt. . . . Surprise is the most vital element for success in modern war."

MacArthur then went on to describe how, using the element of surprise, just as he intended to do, Gen. James Wolfe was able to defeat the Marquis de Montcalm at Quebec in 1759. The Marquis had believed that the steep riverbanks south of that city were impregnable, and so left them undefended. Wolfe's forces did the "impossible," scaled those heights, surprised and defeated Montcalm, captured Quebec,

FIGURE 2

Incheon and Its Harbor: Low Tide



and effectively ended the French and Indian War.

Turning to Admiral Sherman, MacArthur acknowledged the validity of his expressed concerns. He added, however, that he had developed a deep respect and appreciation for the exceptional capabilities of the U.S. Navy during the course of World War II, and he was, therefore, confident that it was entirely capable of overcoming even the formidable obstacles which Sherman had so compellingly enumerated.

As for the proposal to land at Kunsan, MacArthur admitted that it would be less risky; but it would accomplish nothing of any strategic consequence:

"It would be an attempted envelopment, which would not envelop. It would not sever or destroy the enemy's supply lines or distribution center, and would therefore serve little purpose. It would be a 'short envelopment.' And nothing in war is more futile. Better no flank movement than such a one. The only result would be a hook-up with Walker's troops on his left. Better send the troops direct to Walker than by such an indirect and costly process."

The key to the seizure of Incheon and nearby Seoul, was that *it would cut the enemy's supply lines, and seal off the entire southern peninsula*. Without supplies, the North Korean troops that were besieging Pusan would become weakened, and have to abandon their positions. MacArthur's troops at Incheon would become the anvil, against which the hammer of General Walker's advancing Eighth Army would be wielded.

MacArthur went on:

"The only alternative to a stroke such as I propose, would be the continuation of the savage sacrifice we are making at

Pusan, with no hope of relief in sight. Are you content to let our troops stay in that bloody perimeter like beef cattle in the slaughterhouse? Who would take responsibility for such a tragedy? Certainly I will not.”

After pausing for a moment, in a move that was reminiscent of his conduct in his bold “reconnaissance-in-force” landing on the Admiralty Islands against the Japanese in World War II, MacArthur reassured the assembled leaders:

“If my estimate is inaccurate, and should I run into a defense with which I cannot cope, I will be there personally and will immediately withdraw our forces before they are committed to a bloody setback. The only loss then, will be my professional reputation.”

But, he concluded in an earnest whisper, Inchon would *not* fail, “and it will save 100,000 lives!” The deferential silence that filled the room was punctuated only by Admiral Sherman, murmuring in admiration, “A great voice in a great cause.”

It was only on Aug. 29 that the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally notified MacArthur of their approval for the landing at Inchon. Had he waited until then to commence his preparations, he never would have been ready for the Sept. 15 landing date.

On Sept. 8, only seven days before the target date, the Joint Chiefs sent MacArthur yet another message of misgiving, expressing their apprehension about the entire enterprise:

“We have noted with considerable concern the recent trend of events in Korea. In light of the commitment of all of the reserves available to the Eighth Army, we desire your estimate as to the feasibility and chance of success of the projected operation if initiated on the planned schedule. . . .”

After MacArthur recapitulated his reasoning about Inchon, he finally received a message that stated simply “Approved . . . so informed the President.”

Such was the fight which MacArthur had to wage within his own ranks, in order to gain clearance for his flanking/envelopment maneuver at Inchon. It proved to be more difficult than the landing itself, on Sept. 15. The first assault wave did not suffer a single fatality, as the element of surprise was complete. Within three days, General Walker was reporting palpable dislocation of the enemy forces around Pusan, as the effects of the disruption of their supplies began to make themselves felt. By Sept. 28, Seoul was liberated. In the two weeks after Inchon, over 130,000 North Korean soldiers were taken prisoner, as the gigantic pincer movement between Inchon and Pusan was completed, just as MacArthur had conceptualized it. He immediately hastened to reinstall the government of President Syngman Rhee, as the civilian authority in Seoul. But for the sabotage of the U.S. State Department and its British collaborators, peace was within reach.

Truman and State Department Sabotage

The “Third” Battle of Inchon—the one MacArthur fought against President Truman and the U.S. State Depart-

ment—was the one he lost. In the immediate aftermath of the stunning battlefield successes of MacArthur at Inchon and Seoul, *the State Department adamantly refused to offer effective terms of surrender to North Korea*, notwithstanding MacArthur’s insistence that it do so. It is through the aperture of this critical moment of the Korean conflict, that one can see most clearly, the nature of the indispensable relationship between victory on the battlefield, and a timely, viable “exit strategy”/peace offer, as the central inseparable components of the necessary process, by means of which peace can be secured. Brilliant, hard-fought victories won on the fields of war, are condemned to be squandered as “lost victories,” otherwise. Regarding the crucial period immediately after Inchon, MacArthur stated:

“Unquestionably the failure . . . of our diplomacy to utilize the victory of Inchon as the basis for swift and dynamic action to restore peace and unity to Korea, was one of the greatest contributing causes to the subsequent war initiated by Red China.”

General Whitney furthermore reported, that General MacArthur expressed his surprise, unhappiness, and sense of foreboding to General Walker, during the days after the Inchon victory, as the State Department continued to maintain its deafening silence:

“The whole purpose of combat and war is to create a situation in which victory on the battlefield can be promptly translated into a politically advantageous peace. Success in war involves political exploitation as well as military victory. The sacrifices leading to a military victory would be pointless if not translated promptly into the political advantages of peace.

“The golden moment to liquidate this war which has already been won militarily, now presents itself. . . . But I am beginning to fear a tremendous political failure to grasp the glittering possibilities of ending the war and moving decisively toward a more enduring peace in the Pacific.”

What General MacArthur failed to understand, was that the Anglophile Washington, D.C. policymaking establishment *did not want to* “grasp the glittering possibilities of enduring peace in the Pacific.” They wanted a protracted, no-win war, through which they could establish the principles of Cabinet warfare that were to be wielded against the nation-state, on behalf of a “one-world government” empire, during the post-war period. MacArthur’s unexpected victory at Inchon took the U.S. State Department and its Anglophile cohorts as much by surprise, as it did the General’s North Korean military adversaries! The State Department Anglophiles could not stop MacArthur from winning at Inchon; but they could, through diplomatic sabotage, prevent the victory from ending the war, as indeed, they did. In the absence of State Department peace initiatives, MacArthur himself made a peace offer to the commander-in-chief in North Korea, on Oct. 1. But without the full backing of the U.S. government, MacArthur’s overture fell on deaf ears.