

# Post WWII MacArthur

## American Proconsul

### How Douglas MacArthur Shaped Postwar Japan



MacArthur arrived at Atsugi Air Base near Yokohama on Aug. 30, 1945, ready to put his imprint on postwar Japan.

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur is an icon of American military history, a soldier who served his country for more than a half-century and is best known for his pivotal roles in World War II and the Korean War.

Yet in the years between those conflicts, MacArthur undertook one of his most challenging assignments: On Aug. 29, 1945, just days before the formal Japanese surrender aboard USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, President Harry S. Truman tapped MacArthur to oversee the occupation, rebuilding and democratization of Japan. Though his official title was supreme commander for the Allied powers (SCAP), he became in effect that defeated nation's American viceroy.

Upon assuming command as SCAP—a position he had craved—MacArthur established his headquarters in the relatively undamaged Dai Ichi Insurance Co. building in Tokyo. From his spartan sixth-floor office he could gaze across a broad boulevard at the palace of Japan's wartime emperor, Hirohito.

That MacArthur's office overlooked the imperial moat and gardens suggests why he wanted the job. Although Truman despised the often imperious and arguably narcissistic general, the president recognized that MacArthur would be a striking alternative to the discredited and

cloistered former demigod Hirohito. Also, keeping the perennially ambitious general far from the United States could dilute his political potential. From MacArthur's perspective, there seemed no greater postwar position available than proconsul of defeated Japan. From that pinnacle he might cultivate further power.

By late 1945, 430,000 of MacArthur's troops were garrisoned across Japan, two-thirds of them flooding the Tokyo-Yokohama area. At the general's directive, signs and street names in the area were rendered in English as well as Japanese, while in the Americanized city center English alone prevailed. Display of the Rising Sun flag was drastically limited. Buildings that had survived the war were largely requisitioned as offices and barracks for Americans.

MacArthur's occupation troops lived very well, in almost neocolonial fashion. The Hattori Building in the Ginza shopping district, onetime home of the Wako department store, became the Eighth Army Post Exchange, stocked with consumer goods the impoverished Japanese could only imagine. The popular Tokyo Takarazuka, which had staged topless all-female musicals, became the Ernie Pyle Theater, memorializing the beloved American combat correspondent killed on Ie Shima in April 1945. That the cocooned American lifestyle imposed upon the pinched Japanese—with millions of their sons and brothers dead, missing or imprisoned overseas—should, perhaps, have been awkward for the occupiers. But the latter had won the war, and most GIs hardly noticed the indignities their presence fostered in the devastated country. However inwardly resentful the Japanese may have been at their loss of respect, they appeared content with peace.

MacArthur recognized that hundreds of thousands of conquerors living an ostentatiously sybaritic existence yet anxious for home constituted a problem certain to fester. Indeed, sporadic outbreaks of unrest had already arisen among American soldiers seeking a quick return stateside; there were simply too many of them with too little to do. Ignoring Pentagon concerns about lowering U.S. troop levels in occupied Japan, MacArthur began returning veterans.

Although the State Department cautioned that "the occupation forces are the instruments of policy and not the determinants of policy," MacArthur went his own way, shipping units home when he could. By mid-1946 the number of occupation soldiers had been halved to 200,000. In 1947 troop strength dropped to 120,000, the following year to just 102,000. The Eighth Army in Japan was reduced to undersized regiments and divisions whose level of preparedness kept diminishing. Although the Japanese bore the brunt of occupation costs, the newly elected Republican U.S. Congress carped about excesses in the military budget. Describing contested expenditures as "war termination costs," MacArthur ignored criticism.

Although the wholesale redeployment of troops suggested the occupation was succeeding, replacements were needed for some of those sent home. SCAP had to tolerate draftees inducted before the wartime Selective Service System closed down in March 1947 and new recruits promised GI Bill benefits following active service. These were less-than-prime peacetime soldiers, eager for adventure but not discipline.

Aloof and vain, viceroy MacArthur was almost as reclusive as the Wizard of Oz. He kept much of the local Japanese government intact and did not attempt to micromanage it, preferring to rule

much the way the British had run India for decades before the war. And as few Americans were competent in Japanese, MacArthur kept the bureaucrats and technocrats who had always run Japan doing so. He never visited either his occupation army or his domain. If troops paraded past the Dai Ichi Building, he would make a show of accepting their salutes, but rather than personally inspecting garrisons and camps, he would send substitutes—occasionally his wife, Jean, and a staff general. Yet this pattern of distant command and remote governance seemed to work, as MacArthur retained the country's institutions and culture.

Once he'd established SCAP headquarters in the Dai Ichi—and settled Jean and young son Arthur in the American Embassy only a few minutes away—MacArthur's routine seldom varied. He left for work at 10 a.m. in his black 1941 Cadillac limousine flying his five-star flag and flanked by military police motorcycles. On his arrival at the Dai Ichi the crowds of curious Japanese parted, and MacArthur ascended to his unpretentious office, in which he permitted no telephone and kept only a legal pad on what was usually a clean desktop. He would return to the embassy for lunch—and often a nap—and then return to his office until late evening. The supreme commander conducted business by notes and conversations with trusted assistants. He rarely permitted visitors, and then only of the VIP variety. Few were Japanese. In his showily imperial way MacArthur became a substitute emperor figure, ensconced mystically atop the Dai Ichi Building.

Every six months MacArthur met with Hirohito, whom he had effectively succeeded. MacArthur had their first meeting, in September 1945, preserved in an iconic image of his tenure in Japan. Hirohito arrived at the embassy one morning, dressed in severe black formal attire, and the general met him in a slightly rumpled khaki uniform, tieless. A SCAP cameraman captured the pair standing side by side, the diminutive emperor almost literally in the shadow of the tall, sturdy American. Japanese officialdom saw the image as deeply humiliating, and the contrast unmistakably symbolized MacArthur's Japan.



**General MacArthur and the Emperor at Allied GHQ in Tokyo. September 17, 1945.**

Yet MacArthur also understood the symbolic importance of the emperor, and in early 1946 he prevailed upon Washington to spare Hirohito—whatever his role in condoning and then encouraging the war—from facing charges as a war criminal. Hirohito escaped the scaffold; Japanese pride was massaged, and order was maintained. (Some high officials were held accountable in postwar war crimes trials: An international military tribunal in Tokyo tried, convicted and executed Prime Ministers Hideki Tojo and Koki Hirota and five top generals).

The orders under which MacArthur initially became de facto ruler of postwar Japan—known as the "U.S. Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan"—directed him to exercise his authority indirectly through the state where possible, while conferring upon him discretionary power to enforce the 1945 surrender terms. The document tasked MacArthur with extensive responsibilities beyond the Japanese Home Islands, the most significant of which was the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops from areas they held at the end of the war. That process took many months, as MacArthur insisted only Japanese ships be used, yet the Allies had sunk most of the nation's merchant fleet. Also directed to deal with the widespread malnutrition that plagued postwar Japan, the supreme commander dispensed from military stocks thousands of tons of emergency food supplies in the spring and summer of 1946 and also distributed foodstuffs shipped from abroad.

MacArthur's responsibilities—and his authority—expanded further in November 1945 when the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued its "Basic Directive for Post-Surrender Military Government in Japan Proper." The general soon put such a personal imprimatur on so much of the document that it seemed entirely his own. He had already ordered the recall of all Japanese diplomatic personnel abroad. Next, he severed all diplomatic ties between Japan and other nations. Thereafter, SCAP's own Diplomatic Section managed Japan's foreign relations.

MacArthur's occupation staff in Tokyo at first numbered about 1,500 and grew to more than 3,000 by 1948. Most of his minions ranged politically from conservative to ultraconservative, and they established policies that continued, rather than dismantled, the *zaibatsu* (business conglomerates) that had long dominated the Japanese economy. Entrenched Japanese bureaucracies from the national level to the villages and towns continued largely undisturbed. Reform nonetheless crept into Japan, for MacArthur's regime also enforced policies set by the Truman administration. The "Basic Directive" triggered war crimes trials in 1945–46, as well as replacement of the Meiji Charter Oath of 1868, under which Japan had been ruled by oligarchs on behalf of a semidivine emperor. A four-power Allied agreement (between the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China) called for a commission to formulate a new Japanese constitution by late February 1946. To evade meddlesome Stalinist input, MacArthur's headquarters pre-empted the commission with its own document, "Three Basic Points," presented as a Japanese initiative. The first of the points allowed the emperor to remain head of state, though his powers would henceforth derive from the new constitution, which itself would reflect the will of the people. The second point called for Japan's renunciation of the right to wage war or to maintain armed forces. The third point abolished the feudal system and reformed the peerage. Each point embodied mandates from Washington based on the Allies' August 1945 Potsdam Agreement.

The new constitution had to be ready in a week, in order to forestall any Soviet input. MacArthur's Government Section chief, Brig. Gen. Courtney Whitney, summoned his public administration specialists—some of them lawyers—and announced that they now comprised a constitutional assembly; they would secretly draft the new Japanese constitution, and his three deputies would ensure the document appeared to be of Japanese origin. The resulting 92 articles reflected America's New Deal policies, establishing social welfare and civil rights, even enfranchising women. When deliberations ended on February 10, Lt. Col. Charles Kades, head of the 25-member committee, said to one member, feisty 22-year-old Vienna-born linguist Beate Sirota, the only woman in the room, "My God, you have given Japanese women more rights than in the American Constitution!" She retorted, "That's not very difficult to do, because women are not in the American Constitution." Once Hirohito gave his "full approval" of the draft, MacArthur announced his concurrence, and on March 6 the Japanese government made public its new constitution.



One area in which MacArthur maintained a hard line was his doctrinaire anticommunism. The supreme commander's longtime intelligence and security chief, the ultraconservative Maj. Gen. Charles Willoughby, ensured the legal marginalization of "Reds." (The German-born Willoughby was an open admirer of Mussolini, and he later became a political lobbyist for Spain's Francisco Franco; MacArthur referred to him as "my pet fascist.") Willoughby's political rigidity escalated with Cold War tensions, and he fed MacArthur carefully manipulated intelligence that suggested cause for media censorship and the firing of suspected local radicals.

In July 1946 MacArthur flew to still-devastated Manila under orders from Truman to attend the inauguration of Manuel Roxas as the first elected president of an independent Philippines. Traveling to Seoul in 1948 for the installation of Syngman Rhee as president of South Korea, MacArthur assured Rhee—with no authority to do so—that he would defend South Korea against the communists to the north "as I would California." When war erupted in Korea in 1950, MacArthur flew to Taiwan to visit Chiang Kai-shek (with the authorization of the Joint Chiefs but not the State Department), a trip that amounted to a state visit to the Chinese Nationalist leader, isolated 115 miles offshore with only the remnants of his army but still calling himself president of China.

Though now in his late 60s—his eyesight failing and his right hand beginning to tremble—MacArthur appeared sturdy as long as he was seen as a desk general. When Dwight Eisenhower, once MacArthur's aide and now his five-star peer as chief of staff, had visited Tokyo in 1946, the viceroy gossiped about prospects for the next presidential campaign. Truman seemed weak and vulnerable, and that November the American electorate would unseat the wartime Democrat Congress and vote in a Republican majority. A presidential election loomed in November 1948.

Eisenhower was flirting with out-of-uniform alternatives but declined to admit any interest in running. "That's right, Ike," said MacArthur. "You go on like that, and you'll get it sure." MacArthur did harbor presidential ambitions and hoped for a draft from the GOP in 1948, but that didn't happen. The Republicans again settled on New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, so MacArthur stayed on in Tokyo.

It was not presidential politics but war in Korea that finally brought MacArthur back to the United States. With Americans preoccupied by the increasingly confrontational Cold War in Europe, the Soviet Union's firebrand North Korean puppet, Kim Il-sung, decided to raise tensions along the 38th parallel. South Korea's Rhee responded in kind. Despite the portents, the United States continued drawing down its forces on the peninsula, leaving only the tiny Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG). MacArthur continued to downplay the possibility of war in Korea. While Kim prepared a hardly invisible attack staging area above the parallel, the proconsul's intelligence aide, Willoughby, remained obsessed with Japan's internal security. MacArthur's Eighth Army commander in 1948 was Lt. Gen. Walton "Johnny" Walker, once a feisty deputy to General George S. Patton in Europe. The army's readiness had declined during the occupation. On April 15, 1949, MacArthur ordered Walker to mold an efficient ground force, demanding the first evaluations of readiness on Dec. 15, 1949—barely six months before the North Koreans attacked.

On June 25, 1950, MacArthur learned of the communist invasion by telephone from Seoul but dismissed it as so much "hot air." As SCAP he had no responsibility for Korea, and he claimed to be astonished by orders from Washington to furnish troops. Truman had little choice: He could not abandon South Korea to a Stalinist aggressor and leave Japan at risk, and MacArthur was nearby with an army and an air force.

The first GIs sent to Korea from Japan, outnumbered and outgunned, fell back, while marginally trained South Korean troops fled. On June 28 MacArthur made the first of 13 oversight visits to Korea—each lasting only a few hours—by air to Suwon, returning to Tokyo in time for dinner. Although he became, by a July 7 Security Council Resolution, the United Nations' commander in Korea, he never spent a single night on Korean soil.

As reinforcements arrived from Japan, American and Australian aircraft pounded already overextended North Korean supply lines, slowing the offensive. U.S. Marines arrived in August, energizing the battered U.N. defenses around Pusan, but MacArthur soon reassigned them to a risky amphibious landing north of enemy-held Seoul, at Inchon in mid-September. The operation was a success, and MacArthur arrived by specially outfitted command ship to oversee the results.



**MacArthur at Inchon**



**Korean Maps**

Events following the Inchon landing did not go as well. U.N. forces quickly drove the enemy north toward the Yalu River, but then the Chinese, who had threatened to intervene in the conflict, did so, driving Walker's army back south. In Tokyo, MacArthur beat the drum for an expansion of the war into China and pleaded with Washington for atomic bombs. When Walker died in a jeep crash that December, and the Army assigned the dynamic Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway as his replacement, MacArthur's days as U.N. commander—and as the American viceroy of Japan—were numbered. He turned 71 in January 1951, was little involved with Japan and was only nominally overseeing the war in Korea via his photo-op visits. On his own initiative, Ridgway edged north toward a defensive line and established an effective stalemate largely above the 38th parallel. Although more than a restoration of the status quo, it was less than the dramatic victory MacArthur craved.

From Tokyo MacArthur continued to press for a larger war with China and gave little heed to cautionary language directed at him from Washington. He saw himself almost as a sovereign power and sabotaged diplomatic efforts to end hostilities. He told invited friendly journalists that a failure to defeat communism in Asia would make World War III and the loss of Europe to Stalin inevitable. In a public statement he warned China to lay down its arms or face "a decision by the United Nations to depart from its tolerant efforts to contain the war... [that] would doom Red China to the risk of imminent military collapse." Courting dismissal while inviting political resurgence at home, MacArthur exhorted Republican leaders to promote war with China under the banner, "There is no substitute for victory."



As Congress was then practically a MacArthur fan club, Truman consulted the Joint Chiefs of Staff about possible fallout from dismissing the general. They unanimously concurred in the

removal, advising the president that MacArthur's insubordination violated the president's authority as commander in chief. On April 11, 1951, Truman held an early morning press conference and addressed the nation by radio that evening to announce a change of command: Ridgway, whose fourth star MacArthur had spitefully disapproved, would take over in both Korea and Japan.

MacArthur did not go quietly. Orchestrated by his deputies and loyal Japanese functionaries, the general's April 16 dawn departure from Tokyo aboard his command plane—a Lockheed Constellation christened *Bataan*—was emotional. Authorities declared a school holiday and furnished children with small American and Japanese flags. NHK public radio broadcast the departure. The *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper published an editorial headlined LAMENT FOR GENERAL MACARTHUR, reporting that of the three *banzai* cheers scheduled to be shouted as MacArthur's party proceeded through Tokyo to Haneda Airport, only the first two were voiced. When crowds saw Jean MacArthur weeping, the paper explained, "the third *banzai* would not come out." Many Japanese displayed heartfelt banners in the language the general had never attempted to learn: WE LOVE YOU. WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE GENERAL. WITH SINCERE REGRET. SAYONARA. A resolution of the Japanese Diet cited MacArthur as the one "who helped our country out of the confusion and poverty prevailing at the time the war ended." For the Japanese people, long accustomed to a remote and nearly invisible emperor, MacArthur had filled the vacuum as surrogate demigod.

On the airport tarmac the general shook hands with his successor, Ridgway, many senior officers and Japanese dignitaries. Cannon boomed a 19-gun salute. Eighteen jet fighters and four B-29s flew low overhead. As the hatch of *Bataan* closed, an Army band played "Auld Lang Syne." Then troops were dismissed, flags furled, and another working day began in Japan.

By Stanley Weintraub

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