United States against the North Korean invasion of the South in June 1950. Korea, a strategic, oft-disputed peninsula on Asia’s Pacific Coast, had been divided at the 38th Parallel between communism in the North and democracy in the South in the immediate postwar period. With the support of the USSR, the North Korean Army invaded the South.

This prompted a diplomatic and military response from the United States and other democratic countries. The United States led the move in the UN for immediate action to deal with this aggression. The UN Security Council, minus the Russian delegation, authorized immediate armed opposition to the invasion.

Great Britain, who had supported the United States in the Security Council, provided the second heaviest contribution to the war effort. British troops were to be the nucleus of what was to be known as the Commonwealth Division—with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand joining Britain in the Korean War.

These Central Files reveal how the deployment of British forces became a source of friction in the Clement Attlee government; many in Attlee’s own party were inclined to feel that Britain had become too prone to follow the United States, especially in the Far East. Britain had much more at stake with investments in China, and the very existence of Hong Kong depended on trade with the Chinese mainland.

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Britain fights to keep Malaya within the empire
Malaya’s value to Great Britain was its earnings from production of a considerable share of the world’s tin and rubber. Because Malaya was so profitable, Britain spared no pains in protecting it against Communist subversion. The Central Files reveal that this was no simple task. Scholars will uncover documentation on

- Chinese Communist infiltration of Malayan jungles and rubber plantations;
- Communist “hit and run” guerrilla tactics; and
- British enlistment of the aid of large forces of Malay police and special constables.

Anti-British sentiment leads to repeated clashes
In other areas, the phenomenal development of the new oil fields in Arabia and the Persian Gulf region added significance to every aspect of Britain’s role in the Arab world.

The files document that strong anti-British sentiment also arose in a non-Arab, though Moslem, country—Iran. In March 1951, the pro-British premier of Iran was assassinated, and shortly afterward the Iranian Parliament passed an act nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The British government and financiers owned the controlling shares in the company, and the Iranian Nationalists demanded a higher royalty.

Scholars will find that Britain’s efforts at negotiation, as well as those of the United States as mediator, proved fruitless in view of the Iranian Nationalist fervor. Reports document that eventually the Iranian government of Mohammad Mossdeq expelled British oil technicians. Problems
quickly arose, however, for Iran did not know how to refine oil. Not long after the termination of the Mossadeq government, British, French, and American oil technicians returned and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (renamed the British Petroleum Company) received compensation for its losses and resumed production.

Longstanding difficulties reach climax in Egypt
In Egypt, anti-British feeling that went back to 1882 mounted. Prior to 1952, British troops had been used to subdue Nationalist and anti-British rioting and demonstrations in Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone. In 1952, this nationalistic fervor reached its climax with a military coup d’état against King Farouk, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. A year later, Egypt became a republic, with power concentrated in the hands of Nasser. Nasser quickly extended his influence to other parts of the Arab world.

The Central Files reveal the effect of anti-British Egyptian sentiment on the British Empire. By late 1954, Britain had been forced to further withdraw from Egyptian territory and a portion of the Suez Canal Zone.

Britain takes on mentor role in Africa
In 1952, Kenya was the setting for the Mau Mau Uprising. British and native troops were able to eventually eliminate the support structure for the Mau Maus and the uprising ended as abruptly as it had begun. Reports explain British reluctance to abandon Kenya’s thousands of white settlers to a native-dominated state, as well as her decision to grant Kenya partial self-government under Julius K. Nyerere.

In West Africa, Britain granted freedom more easily. Central Files documentation of the crown colony Gold Coast details its development of democratic institutions and a constitution through the work of a parliamentary commission. Eventually, the British governor-general would appoint a young Kwame Nkrumah as a virtual prime minister.

In 1954, Britain created the Federation of Nigeria with internal self-government. In South Africa, the election of 1953 solidified the Afrikaner policy of apartheid.

Britain devises dominion status for the Commonwealth
The Central Files demonstrate that the arrangement of dominion status for India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, Malaya, and others was a master stroke of mutual benefit to all parties. In contrast to the violent rupture of imperial ties in French Indochina, Dutch Indonesia, and Algeria, these new nations remained nominally within the British sphere, even though they managed their own foreign relations, defense, and internal affairs. Some members of the Commonwealth chose to remain within the empire even after they had become republics. India, the first of these, became in 1950 a sovereign democratic republic.

Sample documents
- Controversy Arises Over British Treatment of Jewish Fleeing Iron Curtain Countries. 4/28/50
- Iranian Ambassador Blasts British Policy in Iran and Notes that Iranians Only Fear the Russians While They Hate the British. 7/29/50
- Growing Tension in Anglo-Egyptian Relations Threatens Stability of Suez Canal Zone. 8/8/51
- Intensified Arab Nationalism Jeopardizes U.K.’s Role in Middle East. 8/31/51
- Northern Ireland Bristles Over Consular Placement By Great Britain. 10/31/51
- British Government Counters Rising Communist Threat in Southeast Asia. 2/12/52
- Soviet Union Protests the Creation of the ‘Middle East Command.’ 2/14/52
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- Suspension Of “Trading with the Enemy Actual Orders” Regarding Austria. 11/12/52
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- U.S. Government Expresses Concern Over U.K.’s Pledge To Defend Yugoslavia if Attacked. 4/1/53
- Churchill Urges Greater Military and Economic Unity Among Leading Western Powers. 5/11/53
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- Southern Sudanese Charge British Misruled Them. 7/29/53
- Anthony Eden Expresses Optimism Over Improved Relations with a Post-Stalin USSR. 11/6/53
- Controversy Erupts Over Diplomatic Relations with Spain. 3/30/54
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