



# Painting Yourself into a Corner: Truman and the Decision to Go to War, June 1950

*U.S. Army War College*

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In June 1950, President Truman committed the United States to the defense of South Korea. Hailed as a brave and decisive move, Truman's decision rested on an uncertain assumption: that the U.S. military was capable of coming to Korea's defense. This assumption was tested immediately and fared poorly: the first U.S. ground unit in combat in Korea, Task Force Smith, engaged the North Koreans and was promptly chewed up. Rather than inspire confidence, the rout of Task Force Smith caused panic. The fate of Task Force Smith so traumatized the Army that even today junior officers are taught that there will be "No more Task Force Smiths!" But why was there a "Task Force Smith" in the first place? Using a "policy formulation model" developed at the U.S. Army War College, this book will examine events, circumstances, assumptions, and decisions that shaped the military's ability to answer Truman's summons. The book will show that the military was increasingly constrained by budget and doctrinal decisions following World War II so that it was unable to offer Truman any options. Seen through the lens of the model, the debacle we now know of as "Task Force Smith" appears to have been inevitable.

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