Through a microhistory of military interrogation rooms, this talk will address a key paradox of the post-1945 global order: if the claims to sovereignty increased on the world stage of politics during an era of formal decolonization, why have wars waged under the labels of “intervention” and “occupation” multiplied exponentially on this very same world stage? I examine the Korean War – the war that was not a war but a “police action” - as a formative event in the invention of current day “wars of intervention.” Even though it is the 1953 ceasefire that maintains the fragile peace on the Korean peninsula, scholars have dismissed the very controversy that delayed the signing of the ceasefire for eighteen months during the war - the issue of prisoner of war repatriation. I contend that the POW debate heralded a crisis in the “laws of war” and their assumed notions of sovereignty when faced with formal decolonization, legacies of which are still with us today in the debates over drones, surveillance, and extraordinary rendition.

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