The Korean War: 1950-1953

By Olivia Nail-Beatty
Pre-Cold War Korea

- Korea is sandwiched between Japan to the east, Russia to the northeast, and China to the northwest.
- It was in the middle of Asian imperial rivalries for thousands of years.
- For most of the beginning of the 20th century, Korea was annexed and exploited by Japan.
- Local rebellions were suppressed with extreme brutality.
- The Japanese established modern infrastructure on the peninsula to take advantage of the rich mineral deposits in North Korea.
- WWII brought Korean independence from Japan.
The 38th Parallel

- Latitude 38°N that roughly divides North and South Korea.
- The line was chosen by U.S. military planners near the end of World War II at the Potsdam Conference.
- The U.S.S.R got land North of the parallel from the surrender of the Japanese forces in Korea.
- The U.S. got land South of the parallel from the surrender of the Japanese forces in Korea.
- The line was supposed to be temporary, but when the Cold War began, a U.S.-oriented regime in South Korea led by Syngman Rhee was established and a communist regime in North Korea under Kim Il-sung.
Civil War

- In 1947, Truman convinced the United Nations to assume responsibility for the country.
- The South Korean police force and constabulary doubled in size and the south had a security force of 80,000.
- Kim Il-Sung strengthened his control over the communist party and military forces resulting in a force of 100,000.
- The creation of an independent South Korea in 1948 was opposed by southern communists, and the south was engulfed in a partisan war.
- The fighting expanded into a border war between North and South Korea.
- The partisan war failed and The Republic of Korea was formed in August 1948 with Syngman Rhee as president.
- North Korea proclaimed itself the People’s Democratic Republic under Kim Il-Sung.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>North Korea</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
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<td>● The Soviets wanted to ensure that the peninsula would be ruled by a friendly communist government.</td>
<td>● The U.S. insisted that Korea not fall completely under Soviet rule.</td>
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<td>● With Soviet assistance, Kim II Sung began organizing an authoritarian communist regime.</td>
<td>● Previously exiled Syngman Rhee established his own administration</td>
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<td>○ No less authoritarian</td>
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<td>○ Anti Communist and backed by U.S.</td>
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“Defense Perimeter”

- In January 1950, American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, gave this speech to the National Press Club in Washington D.C.
- He vowed that the U.S. would always be the best ally for those in Asia who sought “their own national independence”
- He argued that anyone that sought help from the Soviet Union would just end up controlled by them.
- He claimed that the U.S. had a vital “defense perimeter” which was a line that the Soviets could not cross without threatening America’s core national security interests.
- He said that in the Pacific the line ran from the Aleutian Islands off Alaska to Japan, through the Ryukyu Islands between Japan and Taiwan, and south to the Philippines.
- He left Korea out of his speech.
"Defense Perimeter"

- It’s not clear that Acheson was sending a message to the Soviet Union that the U.S. would not fight to preserve Rhee’s government in South Korea.
- It is thought, that that is exactly what Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, though Acheson meant.
- Kim had been asking Stalin to authorize and support a communist invasion of South Korea for a long time.
- Stalin held back, fearful of how America would retaliate, but after the “defense perimeter” speech, he allowed Kim to invade South Korea and attempt to topple Rhee’s regime.
Initial Invasion

- June 25th, 1950.
- North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel with an overwhelming artillery barrage.
- South Korean forces were completely unprepared.
- The principal offensive of the North Korean People’s Army (KPA) drove across the Imjin River towards Seoul.
- Other offensives went through the cities of Ch’unch’ŏn, Inje, Hongch’ŏn, and Kangnŭng.
- The KPA entered Seoul on June 25th, but they did not accomplish their goal of a quick and easy surrender of the Rhee government and the disintegration of South Korea’s army.
- The remnants of Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) formed a defense line south of the Han river.
Results

- South Korea would need help from the U.S.
- Truman first ordered MacArthur, the general in charge of the Southwest Pacific Theatre, to transfer weapons and supplies to the ROKA and use air cover to protect the evacuation of U.S. citizens.
- Truman did not press for a congressional declaration of war because it would be time consuming.
- Instead, Truman went to the UN for sanction.
- The UN called for the invasion to stop, and provided military assistance to South Korea on July 27th.
- Any of these resolutions could have been vetoed by the Soviet Union, but at the time the Soviets were boycotting the union over the issue of the admission of communist China to the UN.
- General Douglas MacArthur named commander of all UN forces in Korea.
The Battle of Pusan Perimeter.

- For almost eight weeks after the involvement of the U.S. soldiers fought and died.
- The U.S. did not have enough effective military power to face the invasion.
- Refugees fled south increasing the threat of guerilla infiltration.
- Civilians were killed due to this.
- This conflict in which the South Koreans with support from the UN is known as The Battle of Pusan Perimeter.
- Eventually, in late August, the ROKA organized the troops supplied by the UN and the US under the leadership of MacArthur, and provided with supplies, ROKA was able to make a push and drive out the exhausted North Koreans.
- The strategic balance of the war was altered by the X Corps (the U.S.).
Battles along the 38th Parallel

June 27, 1950

● US first intervenes
  ○ Congress supported the intervention despite fear of open warfare w/ USSR
  ○ War was not officially declared — known as the Korean “Conflict”

● The UN gave military support to South Korea

● General MacArthur became commander of all forces in the area and became the leading general in the war.

July 20, 1950

● Occurred at Yecheon

● First US victory

● Won by black 24th infantry
Battles along the 38th Parallel

August 1950
- Half of ROKA army had been destroyed
- U.S. intervention was not as coordinated as planned
- Defense perimeter created around Pusan

September 15, 1950
- First huge offensive maneuver into North Korean territory
- Amphibious landing at Inch'ŏn

October 1950
- Located at Pyongyang
- UN and South Korean forces across border in North Korean territory
- The attack extended to the Yalu River but was stopped by Chinese forces
Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964)

- Graduated from West Point in 1903
- Helped lead the 42nd Division in France during World War I
- U.S. general responsible for the Southwest Pacific Theatre in WWII
- He was very talented as a general
- Had very aggressive strategies
  - Included cutting of North Korean supplies
- Had offensive battle strategies
Limited Engagement

- The idea that a country will only use a limited amount of their weaponry
- Little mobilization
  - the action of a country or its government preparing and organizing troops for active service
  - Not as many troops involved
- Citizens are not supposed to be as involved in the war
- Truman dictated that the U.S. would not use nuclear weapons because of the fear of the retaliation the US would face from the Soviet Union and China
- Truman’s main goal was to contain the conflict and prevent the spread of communism.
- Truman did not want to fight an offensive war but rather settle the conflict.
Inch'ŏn landing

- September 15-26, 1950
- Amphibious landing by the US and South Korean forces at the port of Inch'ŏn near South Korean capital of Seoul which was being occupied by North Korea.
- Bold and daring operation executed under difficult circumstances by General MacArthur.
- The landing reversed the tide of the war, making the advancing North Korean army to retreat.
- Became an offensive war.
China’s Involvement

- China became communist October 1, 1949
- Stalin passed control to China to keep Korea communist
- Leader of China, Mao Zedong, had allegiance to the Soviet Union, but also was ready to prove himself to the world as an independent nation.
- Truman was concerned that China would get involved so he ordered MacArthur not to approach the Yalu River (the border between China and North Korea).
- MacArthur's forces had been battling small units of Chinese forces alongside North Korean troops since late October, but it was believed the soldiers were not acting for the Chinese government.
China’s Involvement

- After Inch’ŏn, with North Korean forces in retreat, Mao began preparing troops and sending them to the North Korean border.
- Despite warning, MacArthur invaded North Korea on October 7, 1950.
- On November 24th, MacArthur launched a major offensive intending to finish the war.
- The Chinese got involved with major defensive attacks.
- MacArthur’s disregard for Truman’s orders led to disastrous results.
  - It is possible that China would not have gotten involved if the U.S. had not entered North Korea.
- China had large numbers of troops
- China approached the conflict very aggressively
- The conflict was prolonged extensively
- China wanted communism to spread
Whereas recent events in Korea and elsewhere constitute a grave threat to the peace of the world and imperil the efforts of this country and those of the United Nations to prevent aggression and armed conflict; and

Whereas world conquest by communist imperialism is the goal of the forces of aggression that have been loosed upon the world; and

Whereas, if the goal of communist imperialism were to be achieved, the people of this country would no longer enjoy the full and rich life they have with God's help built for themselves and their children; they would no longer enjoy the blessings of the freedom of worshipping as they severally choose, the freedom of reading and listening to what they choose, the right of free speech including the right to criticize their Government, the right to choose those who conduct their Government, the right to engage freely in collective bargaining, the right to engage freely in their own business enterprises, and the many other freedoms and rights which are a part of our way of life; and

Whereas the increasing menace of the forces of communist aggression requires that the national defense of the United States be strengthened as speedily as possible:

Now, Therefore, I, Harry S. Truman, president of the United States of America, do proclaim the existence of a national emergency, which requires that the military, naval, air, and civilian defenses of this country be strengthened as speedily as possible to the end that we may be able to repel any and all threats against our national security and to fulfill our responsibilities in the efforts being made through the United Nations and otherwise to bring about lasting peace.

I summon all citizens to make a united effort for the security and well-being of our beloved country and to place its needs foremost in thought and action that the full moral and material strength of the Nation may be readied for the dangers which threaten us.
I summon our farmers, our workers in industry, and our businessmen to make a mighty production effort to meet the defense requirements of the Nation and to this end to eliminate all waste and inefficiency and to subordinate all lesser interests to the common good.

I summon every person and every community to make, with a spirit of neighborliness, whatever sacrifices are necessary for the welfare of the Nation.

I summon all State and local leaders and officials to cooperate fully with the military and civilian defense agencies of the United States in the national defense program.

I summon all citizens to be loyal to the principles upon which our Nation is rounded, to keep faith with our friends and allies, and to be firm in our devotion to the peaceful purposes for which the United Nations was rounded.

I am confident that we will meet the dangers that confront us with courage and determination, strong in the faith that we can thereby "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States of America to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington this sixteenth day of December in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and seventy-fifth.
Origin— Proclamation given and signed by President Truman on December 16, 1950 proclaiming a national emergency.

Purpose— To declare national emergency to ready the military and send the military-industrial complex into preparation for the war and even a possible third world war. Also, to unite the nation and ask that they also prepare for war time.

Content— “which requires that the military, naval, air, and civilian defenses of this country be strengthened as speedily as possible to the end that we may be able to repel any and all threats against our national security.”
“I summon every person and every community to make, with a spirit of neighborliness, whatever sacrifices are necessary for the welfare of the Nation.”
Value— The signing of this proclamation and Truman’s speech indicated that the Cold War, which up to this point had been a battle of words and threats, had become actual military reality. The Korean War was the first “hot war” of the cold war.

Limitations— This document is an official statement and does not provide any context for the decisions that lead to national emergency being proclaimed. The document does not give Truman’s, or the military’s, actual opinion on the war, but rather a compromise.
# Truman vs MacArthur

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<td>● Modest</td>
<td>● Egotistical</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Favored limited engagement</td>
<td>● Took a very aggressive and offensive approach to the war</td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Fearful of nuclear weapons</td>
<td>● Believed that total victory was the only way to end the war</td>
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<td>● Wanted to keep the conflict</td>
<td>● Insubordinate and directly disobeyed Truman’s orders.</td>
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<td>contained</td>
<td>● Did not want to have a low-key war</td>
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<td>● Feared a war with all of Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Purposely did not declare war</td>
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- Truman and MacArthur clashed for months
- MacArthur continuously disobeyed orders
- Truman dismissed him of his duties on April 11, 1951
End of the Conflict

- May of 1951 became a stalemate
- The unification of Korea couldn’t happen without the use of more weapons
- Meetings over the settlement began June 10, 1950
- Negotiations were delayed after 18 months due to disagreements over
  - Venues
  - meeting agendas
  - cease-fire agreements
  - the widening of the talks to include the Taiwan situation
  - withdrawal of foreign forces
  - the demarcation line
  - The exchange of prisoners
- Both sides continued with limited military actions with significant additional casualties
End of the Conflict

- New president, Eisenhower, got involved and pushed for an end to the conflict
- It still took 6 months for negotiations to succeed
- The armistice was signed on July 27th, 1953
- President Rhee, South Korea, did not want Korea to be split
- The Eisenhower administration promised substantial additional aid and a post conflict security pact
**Timeline**

1945

- Korea is freed from Japan

1949

- Soviet Union becomes involved with China and North Korea

**July 25, 1950**

- North Korea attacks

**Sept 15, 1950**

- Inch'on landing. War becomes offensive

**Nov of 1950**

- China gets involved

**Oct of 1950**

- UN forces push to Yalu R.

**May of 1951**

- Stalemate begins

**July 27, 1950**

- The UN and the US become involved and supply troops

**April of 1951**

- MacArthur is dismissed

**July 24, 1954**

- Truce Signed
Battle casualties of the Korean War (1950–53)

North Korea:
- 1,500,000 civilian dead
- 600,000 military killed
- 406,000 military wounded

South Korea:
- 1,000,000 civilian dead
- 217,000 military killed
- 429,000 military wounded

China:
- 600,000 civilian dead
- 716,000 military killed
- 36,568 civilian wounded

United States:
- 3,063 civilian dead
- 103,284 military killed
- 11,817 military wounded

Other UNC forces:
- 187,712 military killed

1. Figures reflect the higher end of U.S. and South Korean estimates, which range from 500,000 to 600,000 civilian dead and missing, from 294,000 to 406,000 military killed and missing, and from 226,000 to 1,500,000 military wounded.

2. South Korean estimates of civilian dead and missing range from 500,000 to 1,000,000. Official figure of military killed in action is 187,712.

3. Figures are U.S. and South Korean estimates. Official Chinese figures acknowledge 152,400 military killed and missing, 238,000 military wounded.

4. Figures reflect official U.S. tally, which counts 33,741 battlefield killed and missing and 2,827 dead and missing in war zone from other causes. U.S. military deaths outside the war zone were 17,678, bringing the total military dead and missing during the Korean War to 54,246.

5. No UNC member had more than 700 battlefield deaths except Turkey (721).

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Results of the Korean Conflict

- Korea is still divided today
- North Korea is still communist
- There was no true “end” to the conflict and there is still opposition in Korea
- The first “hot battle” of the Cold War that truly made it a reality
Citations

