

International Scenario: The Korean War (1950-1953)

The Korean War was fought between South Korea and communist North Korea. The war ended with little resolution and the countries are still divided today.

The United Nations in Korea

The end of World War II resulted in the rise of two new superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. Both nations sought to expand their influence and protect their interests around the world. The Cold War was not a war in the traditional sense; instead, it was fought with propaganda, a nuclear arms race, space race, covert operations and proxy wars. President Harry S. Truman developed the policy of “containment” in which the United States pledged military, economic and political assistance to any nation threatened by Soviet supported communist movements. The United Nations, created after World War II with the mission of peacekeeping and international cooperation, saw the conflict in Korea as an area where they had the potential to keep the Cold War from going “hot.”

Before the War

Before the war, the northern half of Korea was under the control of the Soviet Union and the southern half was under the control of the U.S. The two sides were divided at the 38th parallel. Eventually two separate states formed with North Korea forming a communist government and South Korea forming a capitalist democratic government. The two sides did not get along and there were constant clashes and battles along the border at the 38th parallel.



Source: National Archives

North Korea Attacks

On June 25, 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea. The South Korean Army fled and forces from the United Nations came to help out. On June 25th and June 27th, the United Nations passed directives urging for a ceasefire and for all member nations to provide assistance to the

South Koreans. Supporting North Korea were the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Supporting South Korea were the United States, Great Britain, and the United Nations.

U.S. Involvement

The U.S. Army and United Nations forces were led by U.S. General Douglas MacArthur. President Harry S Truman did not press for a Congressional declaration of war. Instead, he classified the Korean conflict as UN led “police action,” operating under the authority of the Security Council. By avoiding a declared war, Truman set a precedent that other presidents have followed. The nation has subsequently fought several conflicts without ever being officially “at war.”

Counter-attack & Stalemate

Soon the South Korean government only occupied a small part of Korea on the southern tip.

At first the United Nations and the U.S. were only trying to defend South Korea. However, after the first summer of fighting, President Truman decided to not only defend South Korea but also to try and rid North Korea of communism. General MacArthur led the UN forces on an attack and they were able to defeat much of the North Korean army. He took control of South Korea up to the 38th parallel. MacArthur continued to be aggressive and pushed the North Koreans all the way to the northern border. In response, the Chinese sent their army to enter the war. With the two sides of Korea divided at the 38th parallel, the two sides would battle at this line for the rest of the war.

End of the War

When Dwight D. Eisenhower became president of the U.S., he was willing to compromise to end the war. On July 17, 1953, a treaty ended the war. Few things had changed. Both countries would remain independent, and the border would remain at the 38th parallel. However, between the two countries a 2-mile zone was placed as a buffer in hopes to prevent future wars.

Image Credit: “[Crossing the 38th parallel. United Nations forces withdraw from Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. They recrossed the 38th parallel](#)” from the National Archives has unrestricted copyright access

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