

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue #HS-01: The Korean War (September 1950)

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Note to Delegates: This Research Report addresses the entirety of the conflict from a modern perspective. It is up to the delegate to discern what information is relevant and stick to the date proposed. However, “Possible Solutions” focuses on the matters occurring in the time period provided by the issue title.

Introduction

The Korean War erupted in 1950 due to ongoing political tensions between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south. Formally established in 1948, succeeding the collapse of the Japanese empire post-WWII, the Koreas were divided by the 38th parallel, consequently to an agreement put into effect by the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In said agreement, it was decided that the US would take administrative control of the south and the USSR of the north until a long-term solution to unify Korea was reached. Such division caused opposition by Southern communists, leading to many skirmishes, riots, and guerilla attacks in the region. Eventually, in June 1950, tensions reached a boiling point. North Korea, now under the communist leadership of Kim Il-Sung, backed by both the USSR and the People’s Republic of China, launched a devastating offensive into South Korea. Due to North Korean military superiority, South Korean forces found themselves outnumbered and outgunned. They are eventually pushed back to the Pusan Perimeter, where UN troops (mainly the United States) converge and form a counteroffensive, which comes, unexpectedly, in the form of a landing in Inchon, which takes the North Koreans by surprise. Seoul was quickly liberated, and United Nations forces retook most of the Korean peninsula. North Korean forces continue to resist in the North until Chinese forces launch a massive offensive, pushing UN forces back. Eventually, a stalemate is reached, and an armistice is implemented. Technically, the Korean War continues to this day - a peace treaty was never signed, and a formal end to the war has not been declared, although plans to do so are underway. The war led to the death of around 5 million people, and both sides committed atrocities against supporters of their opponents. (Millett, 2021)

Definition of Key Terms

Communist Expansionism

The spread of communist ideology and Soviet influence throughout the globe. The United States oftentimes used this term to justify their political decisions.

Demilitarized Zone

An area defined by agreements or treaties in which no military presence is to be found.

Isolationism

A type of foreign policy in which a nation does not involve itself with the affairs of other states, including political, military, and economic aspects.

Pusan Perimeter

A defensive perimeter of around 230km set by UN troops around a southeastern section of the Korean Peninsula, encompassing the Port of Pusan. It was home to the deadliest battle in the Korean War (approximately 120,000 soldiers), and it was the furthest the North Koreans advanced in the war.

Major Parties Involved

Republic of Korea (ROK)

South Korea, formally the Republic of Korea, was initially founded in 1945 after an agreement between the US and the USSR to divide Korea through the 38th parallel. It became an independent country in 1948 after support from the UN, with Syngman Rhee as president. It would receive military assistance from the UN (especially the US) during the Korean War, which would result in the death of more than 1.2 million South Koreans. To date, tensions between the north and the south remain high, with the 38th parallel still being the de facto border between the two.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

North Korea, formally the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was initially founded in 1945 after an agreement between the US and the USSR to divide Korea through the 38th parallel. It became an independent country in 1948, with Kim Il Sung, a previous Soviet major, as its premier. He held a communist, authoritative regime over the DPRK until his death, after which his family assumed control. During the Korean War, it received support from China and the USSR and lost more than 1 million citizens during the conflict. To date, tensions between the north and the south remain high, with the 38th parallel still being the de facto border between the two.

United Nations (and Member States)

The Korean War was the first armed conflict during which the UN deployed its troops, at the time called United Nations Command (UNC). This was done after the United States convinced the Security Council to request Member States to supply the ROK with military assistance, a

move that would have been vetoed by the Soviet Union if it was not for them boycotting the UN at the time. American General Douglas MacArthur led the UNC, which mostly consisted of US soldiers, but also had British and Indian personnel, among others. They fought alongside the ROKA, which resulted in the death of more than 35,000 American soldiers.

Communist Nations

Just as South Korea had assistance from the UN, Kim Il Sung requested help from communist nations, mainly the USSR and China. With their guidance and weapons provision, the North Korean premier converted its army into a menacing force- much more powerful than the ROKA, which was severely underprepared. The Soviets, however, never provided the North Koreans with soldiers, in fear of further confrontations with the US and the UN, but they did indeed give weaponry that was crucial for the DPRK. More than 600,000 Chinese soldiers died in the war.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
August 15, 1948	The Republic of Korea is founded, a month after which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is established.
January 17, 1950	Kim Il Sung begins talks with the USSR and China for assistance in the invasion of South Korea
June 25, 1950	The Korean War begins after a North Korean attack
June 28, 1950	Seoul falls to the North Koreans. South Koreans retreat to the south
September 12, 1950	The KPA reaches its furthest point in South Korean territory.
September 15, 1950	UN reinforcements arrive, pushing back the North Koreans. Seoul is recaptured days later.
October 1950 - January 1951	Forces advance back and forth, losing thousands of soldiers in the process. On January 4, Seoul is recaptured by the north.
April 11, 1951	US President Truman dismisses MacArthur for insubordination. Matthew Ridgway assumes control of UN forces.
June 1951	Truce talks begin. However, it will take two years for an armistice to settle.
July 27, 1953	An armistice is decided between the parties, ending hostilities and creating the DMZ across the 38th parallel.

Issue Overview

Historical Background

In 1910, the Empire of Japan asserted control over the whole of the Korean peninsula, in a bid for imperial expansion. Korea had previously been under the suzerainty of Japan; however, its formal incorporation within the Empire had larger implications for the region. On the one hand, Korean resistance began to arise within the country. On the other hand, Korea was then caught between two wars on Japan's side. While the First World War did not have as much impact on Korea itself, many Koreans fought in the Second World War and resistance was starting to take a heavy toll on Japanese forces.

Eventually, Japan's defeat reached the point where it seemed inevitable, and, unsurprisingly, in 1945, it came. Korea had formally been a part of the Empire of Japan, so now it was up to the victorious powers to decide what would come of it. American forces took control of the peninsula's south, while Soviet forces took control of the north. The two powers agreed on the 38th parallel as a border between North and South.

Korea was, at first, placed under the administration of the US-Soviet joint commission, which set forth plans to achieve Korean independence. However, it was soon discredited and deemed ineffective. After Soviet rejections of US-proposed elections in Korea, both sides held their own elections. The North became the Democratic People's Republic of Korea while the south became the Republic of Korea.

War was all but inevitable, and by the time it broke out both US and Soviet forces had withdrawn from the peninsula. Both sides wanted to unite Korea under their respective rule, and called upon their allies to assist them. Soon, riots on both sides would see a swift beginning to a brutal civil war.

Latest Events

On September 2, 1945, Japanese forces surrendered to the allies, hence putting an end to the Second World War. The Soviet Union had launched an invasion and now took control of the northern part of the peninsula, whilst the United States took control of the south. Both sides attempted to reach an agreement on the future jurisdiction of Korea but to no avail. On the 15th of August, 1948, after holding elections, the Republic of Korea ("South Korea") was founded and the north quickly followed suit, with the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on the 3rd of October of the same year. By this point, war was essentially inevitable, and it began on the 25th of June, 1950, with a North Korean offensive into South Korea. The south, not prepared for war, is easily overridden by North Korean forces, superior in numbers and training. The South Koreans are pushed back to an area referred to as the Pusan Perimeter (see "definition of key terms"). At this point, the North Koreans are planning a final offensive to destroy forces of the South, while South Korean forces, now backed by the United Nations (mainly the United Kingdom and the United States), plan a counterattack to retake the peninsula.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

On June 27, 1950, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 83, which set forth a declaration that maintained that North Korean actions were essentially a breach of the purposes of peace and also encouraged all Member States to support forces of the Republic of Korea in order to restore peace and unity to the peninsula. It also approved resolution 82, which sets forth conditions for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of North Korean forces back to the 38th parallel. One may inquire how the Security Council could have passed such resolutions, with the Soviet Union as a permanent member. At the time of their approval, in 1950, the Soviet Union was undergoing a boycott of the United Nations for refusing to recognise the People's Republic of China as the sole and legitimate government of China, a disadvantage to the boycott that the Soviet Union had not foreseen.

Past Actions

After the approval of United Nations resolutions 82 and 83, most Member States of relevant international standing expressed their support for the Republic of Korea, with the United States and the United Kingdom being the main contributors of forces to the cause of the United Nations coalition. They had established a perimeter around the port of Pusan, from which they planned a swift counteroffensive. They were also planning a naval offensive in order to bypass North Korean forces around the Pusan Perimeter, which would eventually take place at Inchon.

Possible Solutions

The United Nations' support for South Korea in regards to the Korean War cannot be more obvious. It is difficult to envisage a solution proposed by the Security Council to support the North or support a status quo, as the Soviet Union had boycotted the organisation and hence would not be present at any summit. Member States would likely discuss a means of launching a counteroffensive from the Pusan Perimeter, as well as planning a counteroffensive to retake South Korea and unify the peninsula. They could also discuss plans to discuss a power-sharing agreement between the two. However, most Member States would likely prefer a solution centered on the Republic of Korea.

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