

## Cold War Becomes Hot in Korea

While most American attention focused on Europe, there was also concern over communist advances in Asia. The U.S. backed the Chinese Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek, who was trying to fight off Mao Zedong's Communists. Because the outcome would seriously affect the Cold War, President Truman sent General Marshall to China to work out a truce and persuade both sides to set up a coalition government. His efforts failed because hard-liners on both sides, Mao's belief that he would win, and the corruption and unpopularity of Chiang. In 1949 Chiang and his followers fled to Taiwan. Many nations, including Great Britain and the Soviet Union, recognized the communist government set up in Peking. The United States refused.



Chiang's loss presented a difficult international problem. Who would represent China on the Security Council in the United Nations? The U.S. insisted the Nationalist government in Taiwan was still the legitimate representative of the Chinese people and used its power to prevent a switch in representation at that time.

Korea presented another unusual problem. When the Japanese took control of Korea they tried to destroy the Korean culture. They would not even allow people to speak Korean or use their Korean names. During WWII, the Allies had promised that Korea would be free after the Japanese were finally defeated.

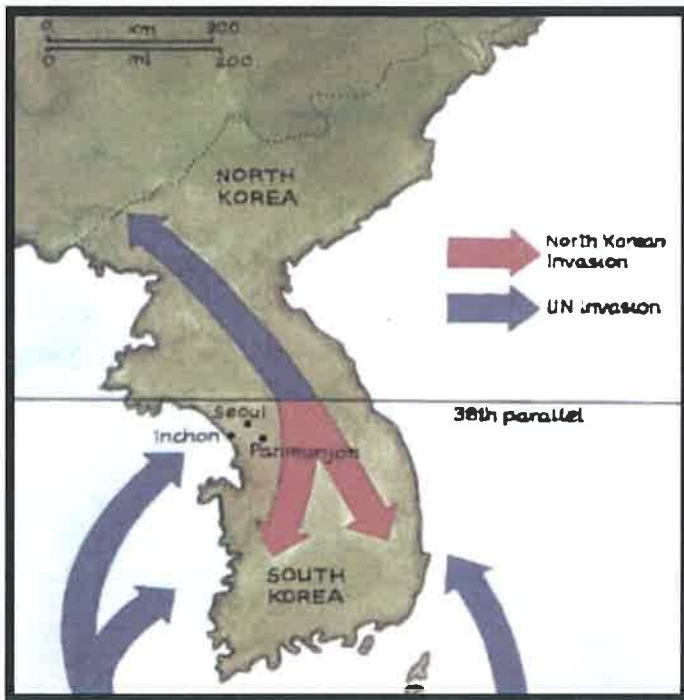
Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, America let troops from the Soviet Union occupy the northern part of Korea because the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had stated publicly that Korea had the right to be free and have its own government. Stalin's troops marched into the northern part of Korea and then set up a communist-controlled provisional government. The U.S. occupied the southern part of the Korean peninsula. A temporary dividing line between the north and the south was drawn at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel of north latitude.

The United Nations wanted to supervise free elections in the north, but Soviet guards would not permit UN observers to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Only members of the Communist Party were allowed to vote. Kim Il Sung became the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north. Before the Soviet troops left, they trained the North Korean Army and supplied it with guns, artillery, and heavy tanks.

Free elections were held in the south in 1948, and Syngman Rhee was named president of the Republic of Korea. The U.S. forces left South Korea, with the exception of 500 military advisors. The South Korean Army had little equipment and was not ready for war.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean troops attacked South Korea without warning and soon gained control of Seoul. Some historians believe the North invaded because the U.S. had left Korea, allowing Kim Il Sung an opportunity to reunify the nation under his leadership.

After the invasion Harry Truman made some quick decisions regarding the conflict. Without consulting Congress, he committed American air, naval, and land forces to support South Korea. The U.N. Security Council (minus the Soviet Union who boycotted the meeting) condemned the attack, and General Douglas MacArthur was appointed to lead the U.N. forces in Korea. A few nations, notably Turkey, sent troops to help in the war, but it was basically an American effort.



MacArthur was able to stabilize the line around the “Pusan Beachhead,” and stage a dramatic landing on the west coast of Korea at Inchon. Many North Korean troops quickly surrendered, and the war quickly moved north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Britain and France feared the U.S. was overcommitted in Asia now, and they worried that the Soviet Union might use this as an opportunity to threaten Western Europe. They also warned that since the front had now moved so far north, Communist China might enter the war. Truman discussed that possibility with MacArthur on Wake Island, and was assured that China would not get involved. MacArthur was wrong, and in November 1950, Chinese troops crossed the border into North Korea, and the war was suddenly much larger.

MacArthur was never one to be silent and verbalized to the press that he could win the war if he was allowed to bomb China and bring in Chinese Nationalist Troops from Taiwan. Ignoring Truman’s orders to cease in his public protests, MacArthur was dismissed by Truman in April 1951. Truman’s popularity crashed to new lows, but in Congressional hearings Chairman of the Joint Chief’s of Staff, General Omar Bradley, defended Truman’s decision.

After three years of furious fighting, it became apparent that neither side would win a total victory on the battlefield. Truce talks began in July 1951, at Panmunjorn, but progress was slow. It was not until Dwight D. Eisenhower became president that the Chinese and Koreans stopped stalling and the war ended. Many discussions were held before a demarcation line, known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), was established between between the two sections of Korea at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. An armistice was signed between the North Koreans and the UN was signed July 27, 1953. To this day guards remain on both sides of the DMZ, which is two-and-one-half miles wide and extends across the peninsula of Korea. The Korean War stopped the spread of communism, but it cost about 25,000 American lives and the Democrats lost much of their popularity.

