

# The Korean War

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1-The Korean War was three different conflicts from the perspective of the disparate groups who fought in it. For North and South Korea, the conflict was a civil war, a struggle with no possible compromise between two competing visions for Korea's future. To the north was a coalition led by three dictators—Josef Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il-sung—devoted to creating a Communist Korea, a single-party state that controlled all economic assets and all aspects of the people's lives. To the south, the Republic of Korea (ROK) had a Western-style constitution and Christian-capitalist orientation and the support of the United States and the United Nations. Within Asia the war was a regional conflict over the future security of two Chinas, one Communist and one Nationalist, and the containment of Japan, while for the United States and the Soviet Union, the war for Korea was a limited part of a post-1945 global competition for power...

2-The internationalized Korean War, from June 25, 1950, through July 27, 1953, went through four phases, shaped by different levels of commitment to unifying Korea by force. For Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee, the only victory could be the creation of one Korea, either Communist or ultra-nationalist. The North Koreans almost succeeded that first summer, but the Rhee government and half its army survived and rallied in the southeastern part of the ROK, known as the "Pusan Perimeter." The United States committed the Eighth Army of four US Army divisions and a Marine brigade, supported by Air Force and naval aviation. The Inchon amphibious landing on September 15 and the recapture of Seoul on September 29, planned by US General Douglas MacArthur, the UN commander, delivered the final blow to the North Korean Army.

3-The US-UN-ROK alliance seized the opportunity to unify Korea by invading North Korea against weakened Communist resistance. From October 7 until November 26, the UN-ROK armies occupied much of North Korea under UN approval to unify the country. The ROK (South Korean) government tried to extend its authority by supporting an anti-Communist uprising in North Korea and hunting down and killing Communist officers, police, and party officials. The North Korean leaders fled north, knowing that China would send support.

4-Mao Zedong decided to use the Chinese People's Volunteers Army (CPVA) to save North Korea, sending in a quarter of a million troops. The campaign began in late October 1950 as a desperate counterattack and continued in two offensives in November 1950 and January 1951. These unexpected offensives, marked by clever nighttime operations, drove the UN forces south of Seoul and the Han River Valley. The UN forces again rallied with reinforcements from the United States, Korea, and other UN nations. Using massed artillery and airstrikes, the Eighth Army halted the CPVA in several seesaw battles, February–March 1951. The Chinese then launched their largest offensive, designed to unify Korea as a Communist nation in April–May 1951. The UN forces defeated this offensive with concentrated firepower and sound maneuver, and a UN counteroffensive drove the Communists back across the 38th Parallel. At that point, all the belligerents accepted negotiations that ensured the survival of the ROK (South Korea) and DPRK (North Korea-Democratic People's Republic of Korea). The US and USSR had global concerns, and the PRC now believed its northern flank was secure against a US-ROK-Japan anti-communist alliance. Both Koreans had to accept the leadership of their more powerful allies.

5-The purpose of the extended negotiations between July 1951 and July 1953 for both sides was to build up the DPRK and ROK armies and economies to a level that ensured the survival of both North and South Korea. Major battles for marginal advantages occurred in those two years. Neither side claimed great victories, although the CPVA believed it showed it could defend against future US-ROK attacks with deep mountain fortifications and new Russian weapons. The US learned that major bombing campaigns against North Korea would not win the war but could stop Chinese offensives. After the US ensured that Syngman Rhee would accept an armistice, the fighting stopped along the current Demilitarized Zone.

6-The cost of the war was horrific: three million Koreans and Chinese died, two million of them Korean civilians. US-UN deaths from all causes were about 40,000 with 100,000 wounded. Despite a series of internal crises, both the ROK and DPRK have survived as Cold War anachronisms (leftovers) and are still enemies. The United States has a mutual security alliance with the ROK (South Korea) and maintains 20,000 troops there.