

Ideology in the Korean War

Elias Daton Kopong^{1*}, Pujo Widodo², Ikhwan Syahtaria³, Achmed Sukendro⁴
National Defense University

Corresponding Author: Elias Daton Kopong eliasdatonlamalouk@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the persistent tensions between North and South Korea, two nations that share historical and cultural ties prior to their division following World War II. After Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, Korea was split into two spheres of influence: the Soviet Union took control of the North, while the United States oversaw the South, with the 38th parallel serving as the dividing line. This division led to stark ideological, social, and economic differences between the two countries, exacerbated by the Cold War rivalry. The Korean War became a larger proxy conflict, with North Korea receiving support from the Soviet Union and China, while South Korea was backed by the United States and its UN allies. The war involved various military strategies across land, sea, and air, adapting to the evolving battlefield conditions. This research uses a descriptive analysis and documentary method, relying on books, articles, and other sources to explore the ongoing conflict and the challenges of the peace process between the two Koreas. The study aims to illuminate the root causes of the conflict and the barriers to lasting peace, while emphasizing the substantial role of global powers like the United States and the Soviet Union in shaping the ideological and social dynamics of the Korean Peninsula

INTRODUCTION

Despite having a common national heritage and cultural background, North Korea and South Korea have diverged significantly. During World War II, the entire Korean peninsula was controlled by Japan, and both regions were managed under a single administrative system. The conclusion of World War II on August 15, 1945, marked Japan's defeat in the Asia Pacific, leading to the liberation of the Korean Peninsula from 35 years of Japanese Colonial Rule.

Soviet troops invaded Korea from the north and controlled the remnants of Japanese military power. In September 1945, American troops entered southern Korea, initiating a division of the peninsula into two separate occupation areas. The northern part came under Soviet administration, while the southern part was managed by the United States. This separation was delineated by the 38th parallel.

The division of Korea into two regions – one governed by Soviet influence in the North and the other under American control in the South – had a significant impact on the social structures, political systems, and economic development of both areas. This separation shaped the future trajectory of each nation and the policies they pursued. The Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union escalated tensions even further, transforming the Korean Peninsula into a focal point of ideological conflict and military tensions.



Figure 1. Map of Korea

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review on ideology in the Korean War often delves into the competing political ideologies of communism and capitalism, examining how these shaped the conflict. Key themes include the influence of Cold War dynamics, the role of nationalism, and the impact of ideological propaganda. Scholars like Bruce Cumings highlight the war's origins in colonial history, while others focus on how ideology affected military strategies and public perception. The ultimate outcome of the war not only reinforced the division of Korea but also solidified ideological divisions globally.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive analysis method that focuses on the main issues through observation and document study. The documentary approach in this study collects data on the Dynasty of War Conflict and Peace that has not been achieved between North Korea and South Korea by utilizing sources such as books, articles, and other reference materials.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Korean War

The separation of Korea into two ideologically distinct regions fueled continuous tensions across the peninsula. In the North, Soviet influence led to the establishment of a communist regime, forming the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948 under the leadership of Kim Il-sung. At the same time, South Korea, guided by American principles, founded the Republic of Korea that same year, with President Syngman Rhee advocating for a democratic system. This split not only caused sharp political and ideological differences, but also spread to the economic and social spheres, where North Korea developed as a country focused on centralized industrialization and militarization, while South Korea sought to develop a free market economy with the help of Western countries.

Tensions intensified as both sides asserted themselves as the rightful government of Korea. The situation escalated into the Korean War in 1950 when North Korean forces, backed by the Soviet Union and China, invaded South Korea. In response, the United States and its allies, acting under the United Nations, quickly stepped in to provide military aid to South Korea. The three-year conflict not only widened the ideological rift between the two Koreas but also solidified their roles as instruments in the larger global competition between the Western and Eastern blocs during the Cold War.

An armistice signed in 1953 ended active fighting, but never resulted in a formal peace treaty. As a result, tensions on the Korean peninsula continue to this day, with both sides still technically at war. The Korean peninsula remains one of the most volatile regions in the world, where potential conflict could easily escalate into a major international crisis given the involvement of global powers. The war between North and South Korea, which spanned from June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953, resulted in nearly 5 million deaths, with civilians making up about half of the casualties. This conflict is often referred to as a 'proxy war' due to the significant participation of global powers beyond the direct confrontation between the two Koreas. South Korea received extensive military and logistical support from the United States and its allies under the United Nations. On the other hand, North Korea was backed by the Communist People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union – both members of the UN – which provided troops, equipment, and strategic aid. This involvement by international powers turned the conflict into a representation of Cold War tensions. Though it was primarily a civil war, it saw major external intervention, with the Soviet Union assisting North Korea, while the U.S. and UN forces supported South Korea.

In addition to the Soviet Union, North Korea was also bolstered by military aid from the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Soviet Union was instrumental in offering strategic guidance, expertise in aircraft operations, and armament supplies to both North Korean and PRC forces, whereas China actively sent its own troops to participate in the conflict. During the Korean War, the 38th parallel dividing line was replaced by the Korean Demilitarized Zone. In its journey, North Korea is trying to unite the Korean Peninsula into a single government, which has been separated since 1948.

Efforts to achieve Korean reunification ultimately failed, leading to the formal establishment of separate governments. South Korea was formally founded as the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1945, designating Seoul as its capital and electing Syngman Rhee as its inaugural president. Meanwhile, in the northern region, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established with Pyongyang as its capital and Kim Il Sung assuming the role of Prime Minister. The division cemented North Korea's alliance with the People's Republic of China (PRC), while South Korea aligned with the United States. The U.S. saw strategic value in supporting South Korea, as controlling the Korean Peninsula became an essential part of its broader geopolitical strategy in the emerging Cold War against both the Soviet Union and the PRC, aiming to curb the spread of communism in East Asia and maintain influence in the region for future confrontations.



Figure 2. The Outbreak of the Korean War

On June 25, 1950, North Korea's president initiated an attack on South Korea by unexpectedly deploying 75,000 troops across the 38th parallel. This move had the approval of Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union at the time, by mid-1950. Seeing this situation, a few moments after the attack began, the UN Security Council unanimously condemned the North Korean invasion with Soviet support to South Korea through resolution number 82. The UN then re-issued Resolution number 83 which recommended member countries to provide military assistance to South Korea. During the conflict, North Korea was in a stronger position, managing to seize several strategic locations, including Seoul, the capital of South Korea, by late June 1950. In response to this situation, U.S. President Harry S. Truman directed Douglas MacArthur, who was then serving as the U.S. Military Commander in Japan, to provide support to South Korea. This intervention by the United States and its allies came to be known as Operation Chromite.

War Resolution Efforts

- Kaesong talks

Given the increasingly dire and protracted nature of the conflict, numerous attempts were made to broker peace and bring the war to a halt, one of which was the notable Kaesong negotiations. These crucial talks took place on August 22, 1951, involving key representatives from various sides. Colonel Andrew J. Kinney (Air) and Colonel James C. Murry (KKO) represented the United Nations, whereas Lieutenant Colonel Lee Soo Young represented South Korea. On the opposing side, North Korea's delegation was led by Chang Chun Sen. Among the significant outcomes of these negotiations was the agreement on the establishment of the Demarcation Line, a boundary that would later play a pivotal role in the territorial separation between North and South Korea, setting the stage for a fragile ceasefire that still influences the geopolitical landscape of the Korean peninsula today. The Kaesong talks ultimately failed because both sides disrespected and accused each other. In essence, the failure of the talks was due to the lack of agreement on the demarcation line.

- Panmunjom talks

The talks at Panmunjom occurred from October 25, 1951, to July 27, 1953. During these discussions, the demarcation line was a key topic of debate. North Korea Proposed a 2-mile-wide demarcation line, which would then become a 237-km demilitarized zone. Finally, South Korea agreed. This agreement showed that the problems in the Kaesong Agreement had been resolved. In these negotiations, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were also discussed. The UN security forces planned to return all prisoners to the northern region, but many prisoners refused to be repatriated. The subsequent phase was the armistice negotiations. Representatives from the UN

Command, North Korean Communist forces, and China eventually reached an agreement and signed the Korean War Armistice on July 27, 1953, at 10:00 a.m. The ceasefire officially began at 10:00 p.m. the same day, ending the conflict that had persisted for three years, one month, and two days



Figure 3. Signing of the Armistice Agreement

End of the Korean War

The armistice came into effect on July 27, 1953. The Korean War ended with neither victor nor loser. In accordance with the Panmunjom Agreement, the military demarcation line ran from the mouth of the Han River, a few miles southwest of Panmunjom, then crossed the 38th parallel, turned westward south of Kumsong and ended north of Kaesong.

Impact of the Korean War

During the Korean War, which lasted from June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953, totaling 1,129 days, South Korean forces suffered significant losses with 138,000 soldiers killed and 450,000 wounded. The overall military casualties for South Korea, including those missing, amounted to 621,000. On the North Korean side, approximately 520,000 soldiers were either killed or injured, and their total casualties, including the missing, reached 800,000. The United Nations forces also faced heavy losses, with 41,000 soldiers killed and 104,000 injured, bringing their total casualties, including those missing and prisoners of war, to 155,000.

The suffering experienced by civilians during the war was immense. Over a million South Korean civilians were either killed, injured, or went missing, while civilian casualties in North Korea are estimated at approximately 1.55 million. Around 20% of the Korean Peninsula's population at the time was impacted by the conflict. In addition to the human toll, the war had a devastating impact on the economy and society. In South Korea, 43% of industrial facilities and half of its coal mines were destroyed, leading to financial losses of about \$2.28 billion. The conflict also resulted in the separation of 10 million families, the loss of 300,000 husbands, and 100,000 parents. Tragically, the Korean Peninsula remains the only region in the world still divided into two nations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Korean War was driven by deep ideological divides between the United States and the Soviet Union, the division of Korea into two separate nations, and the lack of a clear governance plan for North Korea. What started as a conflict between North and South Korea quickly evolved into a proxy war with significant involvement from global powers. North Korea received military aid from the Soviet Union and China, while South Korea was supported by the United States and its UN allies. The outcome of the war hinged on the swift and effective use of military strategies, which had to be adjusted to changing battlefield conditions, including variations in weather and terrain. Both sides utilized tactics in land, sea, and air operations throughout the conflict.

The Korean War highlights that conflicts are often driven by the need for identity, recognition, group affiliation, and social values. It is evident that the United States and the Soviet Union played pivotal roles in shaping the course of the war, significantly influencing the ideological direction of governmental policies and societal structures in both Koreas.

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